MRS. BRADLEY SERIES

My FATHER SLEEPS

GLADYS MITCHELL

MY FATHER SLEEPS

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MY FATHER SLEEPS

Gladys Mitchell

God and Saint Andrew!
Dia is Naomh Aindrea!

War Cry of the MacDonells of Keppoch, and the proud prayer of all Scotsmen.

THOMAS & MERCER

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, organizations, places, events, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

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To the memory of MARTHA GIBSON OF KIRKCALDY, *our dear friend,*
from *Winifred Blazey & Gladys Mitchell*

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Chapter One

★

The Loch of the Plain!
Loch Moigh!

War Cry of the Clan Mackintosh

★

The stout and seaworthy six-ton auxiliary cutter *Kerisaig,* brought from the mouth of the Clyde, had come by way of the Crinan Canal and the sea-loch at Crinan into the Sound of Jura, and, having steered north by Dorus Mor and Scarba Sound, had reached Loch Linnhe, which is correctly (as the couple who formed her owner and crew learned later) named An Linne Sheileach. She came up on the eastern side of the loch past the long narrow island of Lismore, rounded the island, and then cruised out on the western side of the loch to the narrow Sound of Mull, and, making half a knot extra speed, took the western slant up the Sound between the northern shores of Mull and the coast of Morvern, and found the quiet little harbour of Tobermory.

It seemed at first as though her owner and crew had made up their minds to go ashore, but, if they had, they soon changed them. Within an hour the *Kerisaig* had gently backed from the sea-wall and was heading again for Loch Linnhe.

This time she skirted Lismore, chugged gently, against a north-easterly wind, up the loch, and, near to an inn, dropped anchor. She carried no dinghy. Her owner and crew signalled an old man ferrying for the inn, and he took them ashore in his boat.

Behind the inn rose the mountains. Long glens, following the course of the swift, short, West Highland rivers, clove up into the hills, beyond which lay the broken coasts of Ardnamurchan, Moydart, Morvern and,

further north, the lands of Arisaig, Morar, and Knoydart. On the opposite side of Loch Linnhe, south of the village of Onich, lay Loch Leven and the pass of Glencoe, and, south of the loch, the old town of Ballachulish fronted the hills of Appin. Further west and south of the inn rose the peak of Garven, two thousand five hundred feet, and behind the inn, further away, was three-thousand-foot Sgurr Dhomhnuill, between Glen Scaddle and Glen Hurlich.

It was the most amazing country in the world; strange and remote as Tibet; comforting and homely as Devon; a land of the wildest romance and the most rigid Sabbatarianism; abounding in legend; the prey of commercial enterprise; holiday resort and unknown, almost unexplored and hilly wilderness. But in spite of all these obvious comparisons and contrasts, there could be no denying its loveliness, its magic, the gentle simplicity, and dignity of its people. Soaked in the cruelly-spilt blood of bygone ages, rife with feud, torn by the cross-currents of divided loyalties, it also housed, and roughly and wonderfully nursed, the salt and the pith of human kind.

"That was a strange story," said the girl who formed the crew of the *Kerisaig*. "Is it really true?—the tale you told me coming up the Sound?"

"The tale of James Stewart of the Glen? Of course it is. Nobody thinks he committed the crime he was charged with, and undoubtedly there are people who know, to this day, who ought to have suffered in his stead," the owner of the *Kerisaig* replied.

"Then really he was a martyr."

"Well, no, not quite. I've read the account of the trial, and I think he would have named the murderers if he could. He was given no chance to prepare a defence, of course."

"What was it, then—a blood feud?"

"Well, in a way you might certainly call it that. I should imagine the trouble originated simply because the murdered man was a Campbell, and had been given a position of authority after the rising of 1745. There was a great deal of local feeling, which has died down, I suppose, by now, but which could lead to almost any act of violence in those days. But never mind that. I'm hungry enough to commit an act of violence myself."

"I'm hungry, too," said the girl. She glanced up at the tall young man beside her. He had thick, untidy, light hair, grey eyes, and a good-tempered mouth offset by an obstinate chin. His name was Ian Menzies, and he had

been born in the Highlands, although not so far west as the land of lochs and legends he was traversing.

"Good for you, Kate," he said with immense approval. "See what the sea air and a little hard work in a boat, and, of course, my society, do for you!"

"Yes, it *is* strange," said the girl. "I mean, it is strange I'm hungry."

"No, it isn't," said the owner, looking affectionately down on the top of her head and taking her hand as they walked up the slope towards the inn. "This air would make anybody hungry. Still glad you came?"

"Well, it's rather soon to be sorry, isn't it?" Her fingers tightened in his. "Besides, I want to meet your sister. If it weren't for her, I suppose I shouldn't have come."

"Yes, you would. She'll pull my leg. I've a reputation in the family for being a woman-hater. Laura will laugh herself sick at my spending my holidays with a girl."

"I don't really expect you to, you know. You can go off on your own as soon as ever you want to. I shouldn't have been a bit surprised if you had slipped away early this morning and I'd never set eyes on you again."

"Oh, yes, you would," said he; and they looked at each other and laughed.

"Besides," Ian Menzies went on, "I don't believe anybody—certainly not a Highlander—could resist the lure of showing his own home to someone who'd never seen it before. Of course, we come from beyond Loch Rannoch, but—lovely, isn't it?"

The girl stood still, and, with her clear green eyes, absorbed the stillness and beauty of the smooth broad waters, the hills and the quiet road. On the eastern side of the loch, to the north of Loch Leven, rose the mighty mass of Ben Nevis. Almost opposite where they stood, Loch Linnhe, narrowing to the Cape of Corran with its lighthouse before broadening out for the upper reaches known as An Linne Dhubh, separated them from the little village of Onich, and, a couple of miles away, a ferry connected North and South Ballachulish, whence the road ran northwards through Onich up to Fort William, and the loch met Loch Eil, the River Lochy, and the Caledonian Canal.

"I wonder when Laura and her funny old lady will show up?" Ian remarked, as they walked on again towards the hotel, which was sufficiently famous to have been marked on their map. "Laura didn't know

whether she could make it," he continued. "She'll certainly have a fit at seeing you." He chuckled contentedly. "I hope she can get here for lunch. The old lady's nephew is pretty handy with a boat, so they *should* get here all right. The weather's been wonderful, anyhow."

They went into the hotel and ordered lunch.

"Who exactly *is* your sister's old lady?" the girl demanded.

"Mrs. Lestrange Bradley, the psychiatrist. In her spare time she chases murderers. My sister had something rather queer happen at College, and the old lady was in on that, and, in the end, suggested that Laura should become her secretary. Of course, Laura jumped at it. Mrs. Bradley is due at some conference or other in Inverness next week or the week after, and Laura thought she might be able to persuade her to put in a bit of a holiday first. I believe they are joining forces with Mrs. Bradley's nephew and his wife and a kid—another nephew. We won't hang about with them, or anything dull like that, but I *would* like Laura to be the first of my people to meet you."

The party of whom he had been speaking had already moored their hired cruiser and were cheerfully splashing ashore. Mrs. Bradley herself, caught up firmly in Laura Menzies' powerful grasp, was being borne on to Scottish soil much, as she herself observed, in the manner of the Roman eagles being carried on to disputed territory. Laura disagreed with this by claiming Scotland as her native land and Mrs. Bradley as her own unique and awful gift to it, and they concluded by Laura's quoting Sir Walter Scott and Mrs. Bradley the *de Bello Gallico* with zest and in unison. Jonathan Bradley, a saturnine man of twenty-eight or thirty, had his beautiful wife Deborah in his arms, and the remaining member of the party, young Brian Lestrange, a boy of thirteen, had already run ashore and was standing there laughing at the others.

He and Jonathan were wearing shirts of brightly-coloured towelling and grey flannel shorts, and carried their shoes slung round their necks by the laces. Mrs. Bradley was dressed in a pink linen coat and skirt, a white blouse, and a large straw hat. The two girls were in short skirts and woollen jumpers. Even in this strictly utilitarian uniform Deborah contrived to look beautiful, and Laura, built like an Amazon and moving with a long and confident stride as soon as she set down her burden, swung her pleated skirt like a kilt, and imprinted her native soil with the nailed soles of a pair of

mountain-climbing shoes. She wore a little round beret stuck on the back of her head and tennis socks had been given the place of stockings.

The whole party had an atmosphere of holiday, an air of unconventionality, and was surrounded by an aura of good-humour. It tramped quietly enough on its way to the inn, with Jonathan describing to the boy the respective merits of the Irish lakes and the Scottish river Dee for salmon fishing. The youngster joined in when the talk turned on the greased line in sunk fly fishing on the Welsh Dee, and the conversation seemed to be completely satisfactory to both.

Mrs. Bradley walked by herself; not because she was anti-social; certainly not because she did not care for young people; but partly because she had a good deal to think about, and partly because she had an old-fashioned idea that young people sometimes liked to talk to one another without being overheard by their elders. She brought up the tail of the procession, therefore, for the two girls, owing to the immense stride of the Amazonian Laura, soon passed Jonathan and Brian and quickly reached the door of the inn. The boy followed them in. Jonathan waited for his relative.

"I think," he said, "we might as well lunch here, Aunt Adela. We shan't find a better place, I imagine, and then we can go on to Kinlochleven this afternoon, and the others can amuse themselves on Stob Ban, if that's what they want, or we could all take the path across Devil's Staircase to Kingshouse, and stay the night. What do you think? How soon must you get to Inverness?"

"I am at the disposal of the party, dear child. If I get to Inverness a week from to-day, it will do."

"Well, if we made Kingshouse for the night, it might fit in better for Laura. She wants to explore a part of Rannoch Moor, and, if she did that, we could all get to Bridge of Orchy the next day. From there, there are plenty of possible excursions, or a good long tramp to Loch Etive, if we feel inclined."

"What about Deborah?"

"She can make it."

"And Brian?"

"He's very fit now."

"Then let us have lunch as soon as we can."

They went in, to discover that the others were fraternising with the owner and crew of the *Kerisaig,* to whom they had been introduced by

Laura, who, nobly mastering her astonishment at finding her misanthropic brother with a girl, overcame an obvious difficulty by pretending to know who she was.

"This looks like a put-up job," said Mrs. Bradley, acknowledging the introductions.

"It is," said Laura, with great satisfaction. "I told Ian in my last letter that he could meet us here if he liked, although why he was so keen on it . . ." She stared thoughtfully and speculative at the crew of the *Kerisaig* who had been referred to by Ian as Catherine . . . "I don't quite see. He eats with a knife and fork, like everybody else, by the way, if you wouldn't mind letting him join us."

"I am delighted," said Mrs. Bradley, noting what had been overlooked by the exuberant Laura—the wedding-ring on Catherine's hand.

"Ye'll have soup," said the waitress definitely, coming to the table and looking somewhat severely at them. "And if ye're agreeable to trout there's trout fresh caught, and if ye're against it there's maybe an omelette. I'm not just sure. Ye'll have lamb or beef. I'd take the beef if I were you, but ye'll please yourselves. There might be chicken if Mr. Jones is expected. I'll just see."

During lunch, which was of a substantial and satisfying kind, various excursions were suggested and possible routes discussed. Some of these involved the use of the boats, and some did not, and, finally, a compromise was reached. Laura and Mrs. Bradley would walk from, and return to, South Ballachulish, making an excursion along the shore of Loch Leven. The others would leave Ardgour and drop down Loch Linnhe to Port Appin, or, better still, Portnacroich, from where they would walk on the morrow along the shores of Loch Creran.

"From North Ballachulish," Laura remarked, "Ian could run Mrs. Bradley and me up to Fort William in the *Kerisaig,* as we're going to give up our cruiser. Then we can depart for Inverness when we like, which ought to be a week to-day, Tuesday, at the latest, and you others can do as you like until we get back. Does that suit everybody?"

Apparently it did, and the company left the hotel. As they walked down the slope, Laura said a word to Deborah, and the two girls unobtrusively changed partners. Deborah fell in with Catherine, to whom she had been talking at lunch, and Laura strolled along with the owner of the *Kerisaig,* and met his quizzical eye.

"Who is she, Ian?" she enquired.

"I don't know," Ian replied. "She came to dig at Mrs. White's last month and seemed at a loose end, so I took her to a dance the week before last, and encouraged her to cut her stick and come up here for a holiday."

"Do you mean you've lost her her job?"

"Aye," said he, looking at his sister oddly. "Or found her another. Just whatever you like."

"You're going to marry her, do you mean?"

"I *have* married her. First thing yesterday morning. Special license. I wrote to mother last night."

"Well!" said his sister. "And you, that hate women, and haven't been to a dance since you left College!"

"Oh, the dance was in aid of something, I believe," said Ian, vaguely. He grinned reminiscently and then began singing under his breath, glancing sidelong at his sister as he did so.

"Wull ye gang tae the Hielands, Leezie Lindsay?
Wull ye gang tae the Hielands wi' me?
Wull ye gang tae the Hielands, Leezie Lindsay,
My pride and my darling to be."

"Well, I'm awfully glad," said Laura. "I never thought we'd get you off our hands." She lagged a little, and Ian, slowing down, received a warm sisterly kiss which surprised and touched him. The party then took to the boats and crossed to Ballachulish pier.

The road, which, from Fort William, remained on the margin of Loch Linnhe, had crossed a little river north of Onich, and then bent inland a little, but it soon rejoined the coast to cross Loch Leven at Ballachulish ferry. It was windy in the narrows of the loch, but the day was fine, and the strangely assorted party—the beautiful woman, the less beautiful but very individual one, the tall and strong young girl, and the elderly, tough, thin, rather witch-like old woman—halted, with the young men and the lad, near the southern slip of the ferry. Here was the grassy mound upon which James Stewart of the Glen was hanged for the murder of Colin Campbell of Glenure in 1752. Jan pointed it out to Catherine.

"An odd sort of murder," said Laura. "I wonder who really did it? It is said there are still people who know. Campbells, I suppose. Let's go and look at the cairn."

"There's no road, child," said Mrs. Bradley.

“Does that matter? It’s broad daylight, and we’ve plenty of time.”

“What is the story?” asked Deborah. “I’ve never heard of James Stewart of the Glen.”

“Haven’t you?” asked Ian. “Well, it happens to be one of the mysteries of history, because, although a man was murdered, the murderers were never named, and there seems no doubt the wrong man was hanged for the crime. Seven years after the Forty-Five, a man called Colin Campbell of Glenure became factor on some of the estates forfeited by the men who had followed Prince Charles Edward. Glenure was not a bad man, and he took as his adviser James Stewart of the Glen, who had been pardoned for his share in the rising but who was still ardently loyal to his own clan, the Stewarts of Appin. The two men are supposed to have been related, and at one time had been friends. A third person important in the story was the foster-son of James Stewart, a young man called Allan Breck Stewart. He was a bit of a swashbuckler, and was a sort of liaison officer between the tenants of Appin and their chieftain, Ardshiel, who had fled to France after the Forty-Five.

“Well, the time came when, under pressure, Glenure dismissed Stewart from his job, and that caused bad blood between the two of them. Glenure was murdered on the fourteenth of May in 1752 near the wood of Lettermore on this road we’re following now—or as near it as the old road used to run. Two shots were fired by a man who escaped across the hills and was, when he fired the shots, too far off to be recognized.

“Although it seems most unlikely that he was the murderer, James Stewart of the Glen was arrested, tried, and sentenced to be hanged. The sentence was carried out on that knoll we saw just south of Ballachulish Ferry. Some families in the neighbourhood are still supposed to know the name of the actual murderer, but are under a vow of secrecy which has never been broken.”

“Excellent,” said Mrs. Bradley, who had come up whilst this story had been told. “Excellent, child. All the essentials, and no unnecessary trimmings. What is your own opinion?”

“I suppose Allan Breck must have done it, but as I’m not in the secret, I can’t tell whether I’m right.”

“I thought it was almost certain that two men committed the murder?”

“That is, and was, the general opinion, I believe. I do know they didn’t catch Allan, and rather appear to have taken it out on James. Oddly enough,

I was telling Kate the tale as we cruised up the Sound this morning."

"Weren't they believed to have been in collusion over it? Was it not brought forward at the trial that James could not be tried until Allan had been tried?" asked Jonathan.

"I don't know, or else I don't remember. But I don't think we're going to find that cairn."

Traces of the old road, narrow as a footpath, along which Campbell of Glenure and his companions had ridden in single file on the fourteenth of May, a Thursday, in the year 1752, were not to be recognized by strangers. The travellers followed the new road, which, passing the Duror Inn on level ground, skirted the hills and was alternately flanked and crossed by the railway.

Apart from people in a hurry in cars, they met no one, and at last Laura, disappointed but not at all disheartened, suggested that they should return to Ballachulish, and ask at the hotel to be directed to the spot the next day. They had already walked a good many miles since they had left the pier, and, by the time they regained the hotel at Ballachulish, the best of the day would be over, and, as Brian, the lad, pointed out, there was dinner to think of. Ian, however, was anxious to have Catherine to himself, and said that the two of them would walk a little farther.

The group, which had planned to do so long before the end of the afternoon, thereupon began to break up, but arrangements were made by all to meet at Ballachulish Ferry on the morrow.

"Well," said Ian, abruptly, when he and his wife were alone, "what did you think of my sister?"

"I liked her, but she's rather terrifying, considering that she's so young."

"Terrifying? Laura? Good heavens, of course she isn't!"

"She terrifies *me."*

They walked on. Ian felt no desire for conversation. He was entirely, contentedly happy. After they had walked on southwards for about two miles, he said:

"Tired?"

"Not a bit," she answered.

"Good." They smiled at one another, and walked on again in silence. The silence around them was equally undisturbed. The land, with its primitive contours, seemed asleep in the late afternoon. The light was still

brilliant, the sun fairly high in the sky. The path the two lovers were following was rough but well marked. At times they had to go in Indian file, and when they were able to walk side by side again Ian took Catherine's hand and they walked along then like children, swinging their clasped hands in loving and unconcerned comradeship.

"Better have a few minutes' rest, and then get back," said Ian, at the end of the next half hour. They lay in the heather, dreamy, drowsy, and at ease, and then stood up and gazed around them before turning back. It was then that they were aware of a bareheaded man on his way towards them. The couple looked at him, for there was something wild and, at first sight, menacing about him. The man began waving his arms. The clear air made him look larger than life-size. There was an air about him which was quite impressively alarming, and when he saw that they had observed him he quickened his pace, almost running over the heather. They could see then that he was limping. His hair was disordered and long, his eyes, in a white, strained face, were unduly large, and he was breathing fast and painfully by the time he reached the spot where the pair were standing.

He addressed them immediately. His voice was more reassuring than his appearance. His words, however, were fantastic, especially heard in the middle of a fine afternoon in that breezy upland air.

"Do you believe in hauntings?" he demanded.

"Of course," said Ian, taking Catherine by the arm and pressing it gently and reassuringly before he stepped in front of her. The man looked perplexed, and then said:

"Please tell me your name."

"Ian Stewart Menzies."

"Thank God for that. I'm a Campbell, I'm afraid. That alone is enough to haunt me, I suppose. Your name is Menzies? I've got a picture at home. . . . You wouldn't come and look at it, I suppose?"

"Sorry, but I'm afraid we've got to get along, Mr. Campbell."

"Loudoun," said the crazy-looking man. "Hector Loudoun. Don't forget. Hector Loudoun. Hector Loudoun of Craigullich. And, really, I'm not mad. I'm haunted. That's what I am; and I want . . . I really do want . . . company. I've had enough of myself. In fact, I can't stand being alone. Do you know what it's like to be alone . . . and *not* alone?"

The bright day seemed to cloud over, Catherine, stepping up beside her husband, glanced at him, and he returned the glance. His look was

fleeting. He was keeping his eye on the stranger.

"I'm sorry," he said. It sounded stiff, although he wanted to sound sympathetic. "We must get along, I'm afraid. Some other time, perhaps."

It sounded idiotic now. He racked his brain for a parting remark at once intelligent, kind, and final. Nothing came. The stranger cried desperately:

"Listen, man! You *must* come! My life, my sanity, anything may depend upon it! You can do as you like when you get there. You can send messages to your friends to tell them where you are and that you're safe. The post calls nearly every morning. You can walk out on to the highway from my place and send a message by any passing car! Oh, heavens! Is it much to ask? I want to live, and I *can't* live unless you help me! I can't stand it, I tell you! I can't stand it!"

Catherine slipped her hand under Ian's arm and gave it a gentle tug.

"I'm sorry," said Ian again. "Really, I'm beastly sorry, but you'll have to get someone else. Or you could leave the house, surely, for a bit, if you need a change! I can't oblige you. I have my wife to consider. I'm sure there are plenty of people . . ."

His voice tailed off, as, following the stranger's wild and despairing eye, he glanced around at the deserted landscape. Across the water the gloomy, splendid hills of Morvern rose green and purple to a sky against which their precipices and fastnesses were inky-black and their contours sharpened to the outlines of flat and guillotined cardboard. The railway near at hand seemed to emphasize rather than mitigate the loneliness of the landscape through which it ran. The deep, untroubled loch, sea-estuary though it was, enhanced the peace and added to the loveliness of the hills, and the gulls which sailed on spread pinions over the water, and skimmed its ruffled surface, were like birds seen in a dream or glimpsed between lines of a song.

Catherine now tugged at Ian's arm. Loudoun saw the gesture.

"If you leave me I'll follow you," he shouted. "My curse will rest on you. For God's sake stay with me to-night! I can't stand it again! I can't!"

Ian took Catherine's hand and hurried her away. He strode so fast over the heather, humpy and in hillocks, that Catherine could scarcely keep up with him. In less than five minutes Loudoun was far behind them. Ian then slackened his pace, for Catherine was gasping and perspiring.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “I’ll have to sit down for a bit. I’m a nuisance. I didn’t know I was quite so tired.”

“If that fellow doesn’t follow us!” muttered Ian. They sat down in the heather, and he glanced rather anxiously at his watch. They had rested for three or four minutes when Loudoun caught up with them. He seemed quite calm this time, and spoke in an ordinary voice.

“You’ll have to come back with me,” he said. “I have the gift, and I know. You’ll see. By the way, I live just over that hill. Craigullich is the name of the place. Good-bye. I’ll be seeing you soon.”

He turned and walked off. Ian stared doubtfully after him. He could see how badly he limped and how thin and frail he looked. Loudoun turned round and waved his stick.

“Obviously potty,” said Ian, in self-defence. “Do you think you could start again now? I’m awfully sorry, but we’re quite a long way from the boat, or even from Duror Inn. Curse that madman for holding us up!”

Catherine rose to her feet and at once they began to walk on.

“I don’t think he was mad. I think he’s had an awful shock of some kind. I wish we could have helped him,” she said, “although he gave me the creeps.”

“Couldn’t possibly,” said her husband. “Help him, I mean. Don’t know who he is, or anything about him. Besides . . .” He looked again at his watch . . . “we’re already later than we ought to be. It’s getting towards sunset. Can you step it out a bit faster, do you think? I didn’t really mean to come so far, but I wanted to get rid of the others, and couldn’t see how else to do it.”

Catherine quickened her pace, and they almost ran, but suddenly she caught her foot in a clump of heather. Ian picked her up and looked remorseful.

“All right?” he asked. She nodded.

“I think so. Let’s go on.”

“No. Take it easy.” He noticed she was biting her lip.

“Let me go. We must get along,” she said. He released her and took her by the arm.

“Are you sure you’re all right, Kate? We’ve the deuce of a way to go.”

“Yes, I’m all right.” She looked pale, however, and limped when she tried to walk. Ian was greatly concerned. To add to his lover-like and

humanitarian anxiety, he could see that a mist was drifting in from the sea-loch over the moor.

"You know," he said, "I'm afraid that beggar's curse has come home to roost. I don't like the look of you, and I don't like the look of the weather. We might be able to hold up a car if we get back on to the road, but otherwise it looks as though we must visit the lunatic, after all."

"What do you mean? I don't think . . ."

"He must live somewhere near. He said he lived over the hill."

"But that might mean anything in country as wild as this."

"I was afraid of his curse. I'm superstitious. He looked as though he meant it, didn't you think? Anyway, you're not going to do ten miles on a gammy foot, and I don't think I'll offer to carry you quite that distance. Still, let's see what can be done."

He lifted her up and slung her across his shoulder. Then, turning towards the water, he walked out on to the road and stepped out in the direction towards which Loudoun had been going. He did not think that the ankle would be particularly troublesome in itself, but he realized with a pang of compunction that the girl was completely tired out. He blamed himself bitterly for this. He had been selfish and inconsiderate. But since the time they had left London she had been so quiescent and uncomplaining, so ready to do exactly as he wished, so apt to follow his lead and, on the boat, to carry out his orders, that he had failed to realize the limits of her strength and that her powers of endurance could come to an end some hours before he was tired.

He was contrite and self-accusing. Catherine begged him not to trouble. She reiterated that she was quite all right; perfectly all right; if only he would allow her to walk he would see.

Ian strode on, the hard road under his feet, his long legs making nothing of the distance and his strong shoulder making nothing of her weight. He only hoped that they would be lucky enough to stop a car.

They were not lucky. Nothing passed them except a car going in the wrong direction. Ian began to hope that Loudoun had not misled them, that he really lived where he had said. A long glen whose stream made a water-splash over the road seemed to run in the right direction.

"Ghosts!" he said to himself, as a long, low house came in view. "I wouldn't wonder!" He tightened his grip on Catherine. "Cheer up, Kate!"

he said. “There’s the house in sight, and, with any luck, some food and a seat by the fire!”

Chapter Two

★

The Loch of the Host!
Loch Sloigh!

War cry of the MacFarlanes

★

The house, built of stone, low-walled but grim as a castle, lay about fifty yards from the tiny loch which was enclosed in its hilly policies. Ian put Catherine to the ground and gave her his arm to the door. There was a great bell which clanged far back in the kitchen and brought an old woman to the door. The owner of the house was close behind her.

"Hurt her ankle?" he said. "Then you'd both better stay the night, hadn't they, Minnie? You can get beds ready, I expect." He continued, in Gaelic, "Make them as welcome as you can. It's the fine spirit they are giving me, and the great hope and joy. Their company is welcome to me this night."

He turned again to his guests. It was difficult to believe that he was the windswept, desperate man they had met on the moor. His hair was brushed back from his brow, and he wore the lozenge-buttoned black velvet jacket, and the kilt in dress tartan, of Highland Scottish evening dress. His buckled shoes were low-cut and his hose were of knitted web in the chief colours shown in the kilt. A *sgian-dubh* protruded nattily from his stocking, and a tasselled sporran of goat's hair completed the picture of a pleasing, hospitable Highland gentleman ready for dinner and glad of someone to share it.

He showed concern for Catherine, had the old woman help her to bathe the badly-wrenched foot, and hovered sympathetically whilst Ian,

who had carried her first up and then down the staircase, settled her in an armchair with her foot on a stool.

After dinner, feeling very much better for the rest and attention received, Catherine proposed to read the hands of her husband and their host. There was teasing and laughter from the men, but Catherine herself did not seem at all amused as she looked at Loudoun's hand. She gave up the pretence of palmistry very soon on the plea of fatigue, and said she would go up to bed.

Ian carried her upstairs, waited on her whilst she undressed, and then said, putting her into bed:

"Is it very painful, Kate? You look a bit hipped about something."

"It's nothing," she said; and laughed. "Only . . . don't stay downstairs any longer than you can help; and . . . keep your eye on him. I still don't like him very much."

"Oh, he's all right, although I admit I'm a bit prejudiced. It's his name, I expect. . . . Loudoun."

"Isn't Loudoun a Scottish name?"

"Good Lord, of course it is! But . . . I don't know. . . . I expect it's my great grandfather in me . . . I can't explain. It's a feeling I have in my bones. You wouldn't know it."

"All right, you conceited clansman! Don't drink too much of his whisky, anyway!"

On this more cheerful note they parted, and Ian returned to his host.

"I daresay," said Loudoun, taking the pipe from his mouth and gazing at the stem of it as he spoke, "you'll have thought me wrong in the head, the way I spoke to you this afternoon on the moor?"

"Of course not," said Ian, polite and wary. "Why?"

"Man, you know why! I thought it myself last night. It's a queer tale, and an ungodly. I wish you'd let me tell you . . ."

Ian nodded. Of one thing he felt certain: although Catherine probably had been right when she said that Loudoun was suffering from shock, for he looked appallingly ill, he was as sane as Ian himself.

"Go ahead," said Ian, settling down and leaning back in his chair. "Don't scamp the details. I like 'em. You said you were haunted. I'm willing to believe even *that* in the west of Scotland."

"You are?" Loudoun bent and poked the fire. "Well, it started, I imagine, with my accident." He put down the poker, sat up, and tapped his

leg. “I had a bad smash. A fall. At least, I’m not sure it wasn’t an attempt to put me out. You can judge when you’ve heard the story.”

The old woman had brought in the decanter. He pushed it towards his guest.

“Help yourself. Well, it all began very early this year, when a fellow named Ure came to see me. This was in London, by the way. I’ve a business there, and my office is just off Black-friars Bridge.

“Well, anyway, this fellow Ure sent up his card, and when he was shown in he said he was from the Government Commission that was investigating the possibilities of developing the water-power of the Highlands for the purposes of manufacture. He said he understood I owned a glen. . . .”

He paused for such a long time after he had made this last statement that Ian, to recall him, asked abruptly:

“Do you?”

“Do I . . . ? I beg your pardon? Oh, do I own a glen? Well, yes, I suppose I do. But, you see, it is such a very small glen and the only water in it, apart from cascades down the mountainside when it rains, is such a very small loch that I asked him—I wasn’t annoyed at this point, you understand; annoyance came later—how he had got hold of my name in connection with this water-power scheme. He said the commissioners had it, he supposed, and had sent him to make enquiries. So I told him (civilly, I think) that my glen would not interest the government, and that, in any case, it wasn’t for sale.

“‘But you’ll have to sell,’ said he, grinning at me in an annoying way and showing a big gap in his top front teeth.”

“‘The devil I shall!’ said I. And we faced one another across the writing-table in my sitting-room, and, for the first time, I really looked at the man; and what I saw I didn’t care about; so I said, a bit sharply:

“‘The water in my glen is still water. It’s of no use to the government, or anybody else. And I should be glad to see your credentials, Mr. Ure.’”

“He didn’t like that, and he hadn’t any credentials with him. This, as a matter of fact, impressed me fairly favourably. It seemed more reasonable, if you understand me, that he should come without proof that he was a government servant. It’s the rogue who comes furnished with every particular under the sun, including his own birth-certificate.”

He broke off and smiled. Ian nodded.

“What about the accident?” he said.

“Ah, the accident; yes. I’m coming to that,” said Loudoun. “Well, I decided to take a long week-end at the beginning of February, and I thought I would come up here; not to this house, but to a kind of country club I belong to just outside St. Andrews. I had hoped for some golf, but, if you remember, we had a lot of snow about then, and play was out of the question.

“I was in two minds about staying, as a matter of fact, and had decided to toss up for it when who should turn up but this fellow Ure, dogging me again and bleating about my glen and demanding to know my price.”

“Well, we were in my room upstairs, and the clubhouse has an outside iron staircase. I took him out to the top of it. I wasn’t the wreck I look now. I took him by the collar and said:

“‘‘Now, you listen to me. Either you take yourself off, here and now, and promise not to bother me again, or I pitch you headfirst down this flight of steps. Which is it to be? Take your choice, and make it quickly.’”

“‘‘All right. If that’s how you feel, I’ll go,’ he said. ‘Come down and have a drink before we part.’

‘No, thanks,’ I said. ‘Good-bye.’”

“I watched him go down the steps. When he got to the bottom of the flight—they are iron steps, as I said, going outside the walls of the building—he turned and looked up at me and said:

“‘‘Oh, by the way, Mr. Loudoun . . . ’ Then he clutched the iron banisters and his voice trailed off in a kind of gurgle and he looked as though he were going to have a fit.”

“‘‘What’s the matter?’ I called; and I went to the top step to say it. At the same moment somebody came out of one of the rooms—I thought they were all empty up there, by the way—and hooked away my feet and pushed me hard, and I took the most frightful toss down the whole flight of steps. I had very serious concussion and smashed up my leg, and when I came out of hospital I thought I’d come here to recuperate. It hasn’t been a success. This other beastly business started a week ago . . . I’ve written it out as a statement in case I go mad. . . . You read it. Here it is.”

He unlocked a drawer in a small bureau just beside him and took out some folded papers from a blotting-pad. These papers he handed to Ian, and moved the lamp closer so that he could read more easily.

"Mind you, I'm perfectly willing to believe I imagined the whole thing," he said, reverting to the normal tones in which he had described the visit of Mr. Ure. "But I know I can't stand any more. I've had a week of it."

"What happened to this fellow Ure?" demanded Ian.

"That's the odd part. I don't know. He certainly didn't stay to see how badly I was hurt. They'd even swept the snow from the path outside and I pitched on to solid concrete. I lay for nearly three hours before anyone came."

"Well," said Ian, picking up the papers without enthusiasm, "I'm awfully sorry, of course, that you've had such a rotten time. Look here, when we leave in the morning, why don't you come along with us? Plenty of room, I expect, where we are staying."

"I couldn't do that. There's the old woman, my housekeeper. She'd have a fit if I left her suddenly like that. Besides—oh, no, I couldn't do that. But you read what I've put. It won't take long. . . . I'd like you to know what I've been through . . ."

Ian unfolded the sheets and began to read. The style was of literary flavour, and slightly pretentious at that, but the matter was clear enough. It was written in the third person. He wondered why.

"There are haunted glens in the Western Highlands. Glencoe is only one of them. There are haunted houses, and castles grim with legend. There is a haunted mound south of Ballachulish where Seumas a Ghlinne was hanged, and his dead body hung in chains, for a murder he did not commit, and to save a secret which, so far, has never been told."

"Between Salachan Glen and Ballachulish stands a shooting lodge, as English people call it, where lives, in this year of grace, a haunted man. He calls himself Hector Loudoun, and he wears, at balls and at the Highland Gatherings at Portree and at Fort William, the Campbell tartan."

"The first he knew of the haunting was the very odd experience he had whilst he was convalescent after an accident. He slipped on the outside staircase of the Scottish country club at which he had been staying for golf. He broke his leg just below the kneecap, and remained all night in the bitter cold of a snowy February night. He had pneumonia as a result of shock and the cold and exposure, and was a very sick man for several months."

"When he was able to walk a little he left Scotland and returned to London, where he had a flat, but he found the city nerve-trying. He decided to go to his place in Lochaber, to the soothing peace of his own hills and

glens, to the ministrations of the old woman who had been his childhood nurse and was now his housekeeper."

"He had been in the house three days when the hauntings began. He had been out for his first long walk, and, although he did not go far—as a Highlander understands distance—he was extremely exhausted when at last he crawled back to the house. He was sorry for himself that he was in such poor shape, irritated that his strength had not flowed back more rapidly, and perturbed by the fear that his leg, in spite of all the care and attention that had been given, would never allow him to perform the feats of endurance which had been a commonplace of his life before the accident. There was nothing strange or unusual in these feelings. Most convalescents, especially if they have been accustomed to a strenuous, active life and are young and impatient, feel the same. But in Loudoun these emotions were aggravated by the discovery, when, sick and tired, he reached the house after his walk, that his fiancée had jilted him and had written to say that she was to be married in less than a month. His white face, haggard eyes, and air of strain and weariness alarmed old Morag, the housekeeper. He drank whisky instead of tea, and, later, refused his supper. At ten o'clock he told her to get to her bed. She obeyed him; it was her usual bedtime, and she thought that he would be better left alone. She made up the fire with good coal—for peats were used only in the kitchen and not always there—and took her candle. She paused to wish him good night and better health in the morning. She spoke in Gaelic, her native tongue, and he replied in the same language. When she was gone he rested his leg on a stool, poured out more whisky, and gave himself up to brooding."

"On the rug, close pressed against his foot, lay a great dog, a deerhound. Uneasy, sensing his master's mood, he growled softly, lifted his head, whined, subsided, and never, even in sleep, allowed himself entire relaxed repose. Loudoun did not heed him. His mind went in widening but viciously concentric circles, travelling over his troubles, his griefs, his disappointments."

"Humiliation succeeded despair, and self-loathing followed. His Highland blood, sensitive, proud, and possessive, could not brook nor bear the crowning disaster of disillusionment. He had been in love—or thought he had—three years. He re-read the cruel letter, burnt it, and at three in the morning he stood up and limped to the old muzzle-loader hanging on the parlour wall."

“The dog stirred, and pricked up his ears. He growled in a questioning tone and thrust his muzzle against the calf of his master’s leg.”

“‘Get out!’ said Loudoun. He fingered the stock of the gun and watched a leaping light strike on the barrel as a flame shot out from one of the red-hot coals.”

“Above the gun was a portrait. The flame which had struck on the metal gleamed for an instant on oil-paint smooth with varnish; on a hand that was clasped on the basket hilt of a claymore; on the chequered white and red of a phillabeg and plaid. It was then that he heard the voice. He was sitting in the dark except for the glow of the fire. He had re-read the letter by firelight. It was by the less than half-light of the embers that he felt the shadow beside him in the room. The voice was sibilant. Loudoun, horribly afraid, listened, sweated, and swore. The voice went on, insistent, whispering, eerie, telling of things which Loudoun had sometimes heard in dreams.”

“‘They hanged me, my son,’ said the voice.”

“‘They hanged me last May.’ This was kept from you because you were young, and because it happened after your mother had married Rory Loudoun. I do not suppose you remember me. Do you remember the man with the six-ton yacht at Tobermory? I was that man.”

“Rory gave you his name, my son, when he married Lorna. Lorna wrote to me about it. She said it would make your whole life easier. She begged me to be reasonable about it. I have always tried to be reasonable, even about my death and the manner of it, and I know it is not reasonable, my son, to haunt you like this, and at so late an hour, and in so remote a place; but I was not, in life, and am not now, in death, completely master of my morbid inclinations. Haunt you I do, and shall.”

“It is no trick of the fire-light by which you seem to see me. I am here. And you see me all the more clearly in that you do not see me, in the earthly sense, at all. It is my voice you hear, although you would like to persuade yourself that it is the sound of shingle dragged and thrown back by the sea. This lonely glen is no longer tenanted only by you and the gulls. It was my home. It is my home again.”

“I speak to you from the grave. I died dishonoured. I died the death of a dog; whether justly or not you shall judge, Draw nearer the fire, my son. These autumn nights are cold, and you have been grievously ill. My breath

on your neck is cold, and colder than the sea-mists over Loch Linnhe is the touch of my hand on your hair."

"'They hanged me last May.' The snows were still on Beinn Cruachan . . ."

"Loudoun sat down again, passed a hand over his eyes, stooped, and patted the dog. The dog whimpered once, very softly, and went to sleep."

"Loudoun, his hands still shaking, felt in his pockets for matches and lighted the lamp. His throat was dry with fear and his forehead was dewy with sweat. His instinct was to wake Morag. He longed for a human voice and a human presence. But he was twenty-six years old and had to deprive himself of the reassurance her presence and voice would have brought him."

"Leaving the lamp alight, he went to the window and looked out. The night was brilliantly clear. There had been heavy mist in the early morning. It had rolled down from Aonach and Bidean nam Bian, and over the moors from Glen Etive, and until the middle of the morning it had lain wet and thick over moor and track and road. Then the sun came through; the day had been clear and fine; it was the weather which had tempted Loudoun to take his longest tramp since his accident."

"He put back the window blind, took the lamp in his hand, and climbed the stair. He undressed slowly. It took him nearly an hour to get to bed. He put out the lamp at last, and then went across and looked out of the bedroom window. Outside, on the chequered landscape, there walked a man. At first sight he appeared to be part of the night, a darker shadow flung on the bushes beside the door of the house; but Loudoun, whose heart had contracted at sight of him, knew that the shadow had nothing in common with the fretwork dapplings of the moonlight, and he stood at the window, watching. The shadowy man remained still for perhaps ten minutes. Then he came out from the bushes as a man will come out from hiding, cautiously, to make sure that the coast is clear."

"He did not glance up at the window, and, even if he had glanced up, he would probably not have seen Loudoun. He walked away from the house and was soon out of sight among the fir trees which grew in a witch-cluster close to the shore of the little loch that lay behind the building."

"Loudoun found himself trembling. He waited for half an hour, but no one else came. At last he got into bed, and, huddling the bedclothes over his mouth and ears, forced his mind into channels conducive to sleep. This

policy he had had to adopt since the shock of the accident. He gave himself up to a kind of soporific day-dreaming and had so far perfected himself in the technique of it that his torn nerves recognized the drug and usually reacted to it well."

"He woke later on in a sweat, with his heart almost bursting through the thin bony structure of his ribs. The hateful voice was in his ears again . . . the insidious whisper seemed not to have stilled itself before he was wide awake, his eyes staring in terror about the moon-washed room, his strong fingers clutching the sheets, and his disordered hair seeming to him to stand up stiffly on his head."

"'They hanged me last May,' said the voice. 'What are you going to do about that, Hector Loudoun? She said it would make life easy if you took Rory Loudoun's name. Why should life be easy for you, my son? For you *are* my son. And there is Glencoe to remember.'"

"Loudoun believed for some moments that he was going to die. He did not believe that anyone, under the stress of the deadly terror that he was experiencing then, could so much suffer and yet remain, not only alive, but conscious."

"Gradually his heart-beats steadied. He dared not try to sleep again, however. He lay awake to face the alternative horrors that either he was a haunted man or else that he was insane and subject to the delusions of madness."

"He rose as soon as it was light, and went out on to the moor. One thing was clear to him. He could not face a repetition of the night's experiences. At any rate, he could not face it alone."

"He could not walk far that morning. His knee was very painful. Leaning upon his stick he turned off the moor, came down to the path beside the loch, and then walked seawards towards Loch Linnhe until he came to a ruined cottage standing lonely between the edge of the great sea-loch and the high moors of Appin. He limped to a broken wall, sat down and tried to think out what he should do."

"The beauty and the peace of his surroundings soothed and comforted him. Some impulse, of a kind which he had not associated with himself since his childhood days, rose in him without prompting. He leaned forward upon his stick and rested his chin on his fists. The sensation, long unfamiliar, of the pressure of his chin on his folded hands, then prompted him to pray. He closed his eyes and prayed for help, as drifting sailors do."

"I'll just go along to Catherine to see how she is," said Ian, without commenting on the script. Loudoun rose.

"You'll need a candle," he said.

"No, no. I've got my torch."

"You'll come down again?"

"I will."

"And tell me"—he indicated the papers—"what you think about these."

Ian laughed and shrugged.

"I can't swear to do that. I don't know what I think, except . . ."

"Yes?"

"Well, you've had a bad smash, and naturally you wouldn't feel too good for a time, I suppose. Didn't you say you'd had concussion?"

"I know. I tell myself that. But it isn't only that. I can't explain how I know it, but I'm positively certain that I *do* hear him, and that—he comes."

"Oh, well," said Ian uneasily. "Look, I'll be back very soon. I just want to know how she is."

He went upstairs to his wife and found her wide awake and very restless.

"Is he—are you all right?" she asked. Ian sat down on a chair at the side of the bed.

"He's a bad case of nerves," he answered soberly. "I can't make him out. He's not mad. Look here, Kate, I'll have to see him through for this one night. That means I may be very late to bed. Will you try to go to sleep?"

"Yes. Come as soon as you can, and, darling, do be careful. I—well, look after yourself."

"Frightened?"

"No . . . lonely." She laughed, but she sounded most unhappy. Ian had switched off his torch and was holding her hand in the darkness. He placed it under the bedclothes and tucked her up. She clung to him as he leaned over to kiss her and urged him, almost in agony:

"Take care of yourself. I don't like it. It's all rather horrid. Please take care."

Loudoun was pouring himself a peg when Ian went back to the dining-room.

"Have some," he said. Ian helped himself to the whisky, and for some time they sat in silence. Then Loudoun said, "Will you sit up with me to-

night? Then—should I hear it again . . .”

“I’ll sit up if you like, of course,” said Ian, not finding the prospect inviting, “but . . .”

“Can you manage on a camp bed for once?”

“Yes, of course I can.”

“We’ll have two camp beds down here, then, when I’m sure old Morag is asleep. She mustn’t know anything of this. As soon as I think I’m hearing things I’m going to let you know. If you don’t hear them I’ll call in a doctor or a psychiatrist and find out what’s wrong with my nerves. If you *do* hear what I hear, it’s either someone playing the fool, or else there’s something to fear. I wouldn’t ask you—especially with your wife here.” He leered unpleasantly, and all Ian’s first dislike of him came back. “What do you think of my picture?”

He jerked his pipe-stem towards the portrait over the mantelpiece. Ian nodded, and got up to examine the picture.

“I’ve been wondering about that,” he said. “You mentioned it in your —your story.” The sheets, he noticed, had disappeared from the table.

“Do you recognize the portrait?”

“No, I can’t say that I do.”

“Well, you ought to. That is Am Meinnearach before the Highland dress and the Gaelic language were proscribed. He was one of several chieftains painted at the time. I wanted to talk about that.”

“About the proscriptions?”

“No, no. About this—this dream of mine, or whatever it was. You see . . .”

“Half a minute,” said Ian. “Look here, I did think—not to put too fine a point on it—that you were crazy when we met you out on the moor. But I’ve changed my mind. You’re no more mad than I am. I should say you’re in pretty poor shape still after your accident, and that’s no doubt the explanation of your experiences. Look here: I’ve a hunch I know the very person to put you right, and that’s my sister’s boss, a certain Mrs. Lestrange Bradley. She’s an uncanny old dame, but she’s very hot stuff at her job. . . .”

“Her job being?”

“Psychiatry. The very stuff you mentioned yourself just now. She’s at Ballachulish, and is going on to Inverness for a conference in a day or two. Say the word, and I’ll go and get her in the morning.”

"If to-night brings what last night brought I'll be only too glad—but I'm hoping it was only the leg, you know, and some—well, some rather bad news I had. It's down in the script. You read it. I daresay I'm still run down. But if you'd rather go to bed . . ."

"I wouldn't dream of going to bed. But I'll tell you what we *will* do, if you like. We'll have a look round outside before we turn in. What do you say to that? You say you caught sight of some fellow snooping about . . ."

"It may not have been," said Loudoun, frowning. "And, even if there were, he could have had nothing to do with my dream. Still, perhaps—it's a lovely night . . ."

They stepped out among the bushes, the stunted pines, the rough brownish grass, and the heather. The moon was up and the loch shivered slightly in the night breeze. The air was fresh and very pure. There was no softness in it, but almost the snap of autumn cold.

The two young men together covered the policies before they returned to the house. It took them just on an hour, and, by the time they returned, Loudoun's knee was reminding him that he had done enough. He helped to carry the camp beds and the bedding into the room with the fire, and by midnight the two men were lying, warm but still wakeful, staring at the shadows that leapt and slid on the wall.

By one o'clock Ian was asleep. At half-past he was awake, and sweating with an uncomfortable feeling of fear. Loudoun had lighted a candle. It shone grotesquely on his wax-white glistening face. His lips were trembling like those of a man who had lost control of himself. Aware of the movement made by Ian in waking up, he cried in a voice of agony:

"He's here! He's here! He wants to speak! I'm willing him not to speak! I don't want to hear what he says! I don't want to hear what he says!"

"Well, tell him to hop it," said Ian, loudly and lightly. His own hands were wet with perspiration. There is nothing so catching as panic, and the blood that pounded in Loudoun's veins was hammering, likewise, in his own.

"He's gone," said Loudoun, just like a child, lying down again. "I'll keep the candle alight, but I'm sure he's gone. And he didn't say it. He didn't say it, did he?"

"He didn't say it," said Ian. He lifted his head, and listened with the utmost intentness. Somewhere in the house, he could have sworn, someone

had quietly shut a door. He swung his legs over the side of the narrow bed. As he did so, he heard a man cough.

"Loudoun," he said, "there's somebody up and about. Let's make certain it's either your housekeeper or Catherine." He knew perfectly well it was neither.

"No, no! It's all right," said Loudoun. "I shall go to bed now. He won't come back. He never does." He flung off the blankets and got up. "I'm awfully grateful, old man. And, if you think Mrs. Bradley would see me, perhaps, if I drive you over in the morning . . . ?"

"A good idea," said Ian. He got out of bed and they folded the blankets and put away the camp beds. They went up the stairs together, and parted at Catherine's door. "Good night. Sleep well."

"I shall sleep well enough," said Loudoun. "I can't tell you what it's meant to me, having you here. Some time I'll repay you. Be sure of that. There's only one more thing. In the morning I'm going to give you that story of mine. Let Mrs. Bradley read it before she comes. Don't bring it back to this house. Keep it—or let her keep it—and keep it safe. Some time, I swear, I'll repay you."

Catherine was awake. She was also trembling.

"I'm so thankful you've come," she said. "I've been horribly afraid. And people have been walking about all the time."

"All the time?" said Ian, startled.

"Well, it seemed like all the time." But, pressed to be more exact, it seemed that all she could say was that she had heard the sounds of doors opening and shutting, and the sounds of feet and a cough, earlier than Ian had been aware of them from his place in the downstair room.

He was a long time getting to sleep. In the morning his host faced him apologetically.

"I'm afraid I made a fool of myself last night. Will you get Mrs. Bradley to come? I'd be awfully glad. I hope I didn't make a row last night? You didn't hear anything, did you, when you said there was someone about?"

"Only a door shutting."

"Banging, probably."

"All right," said Ian, good-temperedly. "Banging, then." Loudoun glanced at him sharply, but made no further remark. The two men breakfasted together; Catherine had breakfast in her room.

"And now," said Loudoun, "I'll drive you over to Ballachulish. I can meet Mrs. Bradley there, perhaps, and fix up a consultation."

Catherine's foot was swollen, and she could not put it to the ground. She had to be carried downstairs and out to the car. Ian was contrite.

"I ought to have got Loudoun to let me have the car to fetch a doctor last night," he said. "I'm awfully sorry, Kate. Does it hurt much?"

"No," she answered, smiling. Ian kissed her.

Loudoun, who had gone back into the house, came out again looking perturbed.

"I can't make it out," he said. "Old Morag's gone."

"Gone? But she cooked the breakfast," Ian objected.

"And I enjoyed mine," said Catherine.

"Well, I can't find her anywhere. Maybe she heard something, too, and has run out on me."

Ian thought this unlikely.

"She'd have told you she was going," he protested.

"Look here," said Loudoun. "You take the car into Ballachulish and get Mrs. Menzies' ankle attended to, and bring back the car when you can."

"I'll bring Mrs. Bradley in it, then," said Ian. "I shouldn't worry about Morag. She's bound to be somewhere about. Anyway, I'll be back with the car directly after lunch if not before, and thanks a lot."

"You're welcome," said Loudoun. He stood and waved them good-bye.

"That's a funny fellow," said Ian thoughtfully. "He told me something last night about that picture he has. I don't think he's right about it, but he may be. I thought it was a copy of a picture by an artist called John Michael Wright, which is supposed to be the earliest known painting of Highland dress. I suppose he wanted to flatter me. But why?"

Mrs. Bradley, examining the ankle with professional fingers, pronounced that Catherine had wrenched the foot rather badly, and prescribed rest. She glanced sympathetically at Ian as she said it, but he seemed unperturbed, and merely remarked:

"That means the boat, then; unless you order her to bed."

"I won't go to bed," said Catherine. So Ian carried her out to the car again, Mrs. Bradley superintending.

“Don’t let her use the foot for two or three days,” she said. “It isn’t anything serious, but it is probably quite painful. I’m afraid this has upset the beginning of your holiday. Laura is rather concerned.”

Ian laughed, and shook his head.

“It hasn’t spoilt it. I’m sorry for Kate, but I’d intended to stick to the boat and cruise about, in any case, so there’s no need for Laura to worry. Oh, and about this chap Loudoun.” He recounted, very briefly, Loudoun’s story. “He wants to consult you professionally. Could you find time, do you think? He’s in a bad way, I’m certain. He could do with some advice and help. He’s also, I deduce, a bit of a liar. The story he told and the story he wrote don’t tally in all particulars.”

Mrs. Bradley nodded.

“Interesting,” she said, “and the story is highly suggestive, of course. I will certainly egg him on to tell me about it himself. It contains elements which any psychologist would recognize. It seems fairly clear that his subconscious mind is prompting the conscious mind to efforts of memory. I wonder who his real father could have been?”

“Name of Menzies, or one of the septs of the clan, according to what he indicated.”

“Really? You mean because of your name, in which he took interest? It is a starting point, of course. If we could discover that a man named Menzies, for instance, had been hanged for murder when Mr. Loudoun was a very young child, we could get at the root of the mental disturbances, no doubt.”

“If they were mental,” said Ian. Mrs. Bradley glanced at him sharply.

“I heard someone about, and it wasn’t Catherine, and, presumably, it wasn’t the housekeeper,” he continued. “Ergo, it was somebody who had no right in the house. That was a queer tale he told about his accident, don’t you think? Get him to tell it to you, and make sure that it checks with the version he gave to us yesterday.”

“I will,” said Mrs. Bradley. “And don’t you bother to come back. You get Catherine on to the boat and make her rest. Laura can drive this make of car. There’s no particular reason for you to see Mr. Loudoun again, I take it?”

“None at all, except to return the car.”

“Very well, then. That settles itself. I’ll get Laura, and she can drive us down to the loch to your boat, and help to get Catherine on board.”

"Another fairly odd thing happened just before we left," said Ian, as they drove north-westwards towards the pier. "Loudoun lost his housekeeper, old Morag or Minnie."

"*Lost* her?"

"Well, he couldn't find her. She was supposed to have cooked breakfast, and then, when we were coming away, she had disappeared."

"It seems a strange house," said Mrs. Bradley.

"Yes. Loudoun was coming with us, you see, but he didn't like to leave until he had discovered where she had gone."

"He must have a tender regard for her."

"You mean it was only an excuse not to come?"

"I don't know, child. I have not yet seen Mr. Loudoun. Why did you say that the housekeeper was 'supposed' to have cooked breakfast?"

"I don't know, except there was really no evidence that she did."

"Evidence? Evidence?" said Mrs. Bradley, pleased. "There was evidence of the presence of somebody else in the house last night, you think; there is evidence—or is there?—that Loudoun's name may be Menzies; and now there is *no* evidence that old Morag cooked the breakfast. Who cooked it, then, do you suppose?"

"Loudoun himself, I shouldn't wonder. He was sort of in and out all the time, and the dishes were on the sideboard, except for the porridge. That was ready in our places, and was almost cold when we came down. And I'm still puzzled about the portrait, unless he really didn't know the first thing about it, and was only trying to show off. Still, you'd think he would know what it was. Oh, and it made another discrepancy in the typescript. You see, in this picture he's got, you can't really see a claymore. The fellow *has* a dirk and a claymore, of course, but what you notice is the very long musket he's holding."

"Yes, that *is* odd," said Mrs. Bradley. "I confess that I am anxious to meet this mysterious gentleman who is half-murdered by perfect strangers who want to buy his land; who hears ghostly voices; who has night-prowlers skulking in his policies and who mislays his housekeeper."

Ian looked at her suspiciously, but she seemed perfectly serious. He did not know that he envied his sister her job.

Chapter Three

★

Sons of the hounds come here and get flesh!
Chlanna nan con thigibh a so's gheibh sibh feoil!

War cry of the Camerons

★

Ian and Catherine having loosed from their moorings near Ballachulish pier, and Jonathan and Deborah having assumed temporary responsibility for Brian, Laura and Mrs. Bradley set out for Craigullich to return the car and give Loudoun what assistance and encouragement they could.

The distance to be covered was short, the weather remained fine, a splendid breeze blew from Morvern over Loch Linnhe, the heather was at its best and the road was deserted. A small engine, drawing a few coaches, crossed the road twice on its journey south to Appin, and before it could cross it a third time on the narrow coastal plain between the shores of the sea-loch and the high moors north of Loch Creran, Laura, following the directions given her by her brother, took the car off the main road and up a firm but secondary track which led through a very small glen.

In this glen, known locally as Glen Ullich, stood the house of which they were in search. It had a deserted air, and, with its surround of heath, pine, and low-growing birch, gave the impression of a habitation set up by settlers in a wilderness or a house not of the locality although constructed from its materials.

The house was not deserted, however; at Mrs. Bradley's first knock the door was opened by an old woman and behind her stood a thin man.

He was older than Mrs. Bradley had expected, and his face, although worn and cadaverous, was not that of an invalid. It bore traces ascribable to

vice as much as to suffering. He pronounced her name immediately, and seemed pleased to see her.

"Come in; come right in. I'm Loudoun," he said, motioning the old woman to the background and offering Mrs. Bradley his hand to bring her in over the step. He wasted no time after that, but led her, Laura following, to the dining-room, seated her, and took up his stand beneath the portrait over the hearth.

"Now, what can you do for me?" he asked. He sat down opposite her. Mrs. Bradley smiled. It was a smile not destined to put Loudoun at his ease. He shifted uncomfortably in his chair.

"Well, now, Mr. Loudoun," she said, "for your affairs. I have heard something from Mr. Menzies. What was your father's name?"

"Loudoun, of course. Roderick, usually known as Rory, Loudoun." He seemed surprised at the question, but answered it readily enough.

"And your mother?"

"Her Christian name was Lorna. But what . . . ?"

"What are the septs of the Clan Menzies?"

"I don't know that I can tell you all of them." He paused to consider. "The septs of Clan Menzies? Let's see: the ones I know are the Dewars—although some of them are Macnabs—the Macindeors, the MacMenzies, MacMinns, MacMenies, Means, Meins, Meines . . ." he spelt the last three. Mrs. Bradley nodded as she scribbled down the names—"Mengues, Mennies, Meyners, Minns, Minnuses, the Menzies themselves—I'm afraid that's all I know."

Mrs. Bradley cackled.

"A wonderful list and a wonderful memory," she said. "And now let me hear your story. It had better be a complete autobiography, I think. Begin as far back as you can remember. Think hard. This may be important."

"But . . ." He looked perplexed.

"You do want to make a full recovery from your nervous breakdown, don't you?"

"I—well, yes, of course. Only, you see, I thought you would ask me—put me through some mental tests—that sort of thing."

"I might do that later, if you wish it. Just now it is your memory that interests me."

"You said it was good."

"For things you hold in your conscious mind, yes. Now we must try to get inside the *sub*conscious mind. Has that any interest for you?"

"Not for me. I don't believe in the subconscious mind. One's thoughts, some of them, may be pretty foul, but they're not subconscious. What one thinks, one thinks, and one is responsible for it. At least, that's my idea. I don't believe in all this quackery. It's simply a lot of mumbo-jumbo, that's all."

"I do not entirely disagree with you," said Mrs. Bradley, nodding. "What are your reactions to murder, Mr. Loudoun?"

The man turned livid.

"What the devil are you talking about?" he cried. He strode from his chair and leaned over her. Laura, self-styled protector of an employer who needed about as much protection as the alligator she so closely resembled, walked to the back of Mrs. Bradley's chair, put a firm hand against Loudoun's chest, and thrust him off.

"Sit down," she said. Loudoun pulled himself together, walked back to his chair, sat down, and then apologized.

"I am apt to be carried away by my feelings when that word is mentioned," he said. "You see, my father . . ."

"I know," said Mrs. Bradley, nodding her head and then looking at him with great interest. She was wondering why he no longer limped. He had leapt across the room like a jaguar. Like a jaguar, too, he had snarled; an evil, uncivilized sound. She was fascinated by his reactions to her tests.

"That's all right, then," he said. "It's a sore subject, naturally, and one which I don't discuss."

In view of the typed sheets reposing in a locked drawer at her hotel, Mrs. Bradley would have been astounded at this assertion but for the fact that, so far, she had seen in this man no trace of the pronounced limp which Ian had mentioned and which had been accounted for in the script, and (differently) in Loudoun's spoken story. She did not comment, however, but continued casually,

"It is of no use, then, to try to break down your inhibitions, I suppose. From whom could I obtain information? It seems most likely to me that your nervous state can be directly attributed to repressions and inhibitions dating from childhood. I do wish I knew what had happened. I could help you so very much better."

“All the same, he does remember something about the murder,” said Laura, later, looking very pleased. “And when we’re in Inverness you’re going to find out who was hanged for a murder committed in Lochaber about twenty-five years ago. But, honestly, I don’t see how it’s going to help him get over a nervous breakdown. In fact, I should think it will sicken him entirely if you can prove to him that his real father was a murderer.”

“He believes, subconsciously, that his real father was *not* a murderer, if the ghost-voice was a subjective phenomenon, child. If the whole experience was objective, I shall be equally, although differently, interested.”

“Meaning you don’t believe in ghosts?”

“Meaning that I am still open to conviction, child.”

The two of them walked back towards Ballachulish, although Loudoun had pressed Mrs. Bradley to make use of the car again. At the end of five miles, however, the postman, driving a small cart, picked them up, and he and Mrs. Bradley were soon in conversation.

Loudoun did not seem at all pleased to receive, at eight o’clock that night, another call from Mrs. Bradley. She came in a hired car which she drove herself, and was welcomed by Loudoun with a scowl of annoyance. Assured that she had dined, however, he professed himself ready for any form of inquisition, intelligence test, or plain, straightforward deposition which might be demanded.

“Is your father still alive?” she asked.

“No. He lived in South Africa. He has been dead about a year.”

“Your mother?”

“She is dead, too. . . . She died when I was at college—a technical college, you know.”

“Leaving you the property?”

“There wasn’t much, as you may guess. The glen here, this house, some shares which don’t do very much, and some gilt-edged—enough to bring me in about a hundred and fifty a year. The rest I have to earn.”

“This property, then, belonged to your mother? Mr. Loudoun had no claim on it?”

“No, but he always thought of it as his home.”

“Did you get on well with Mr. Loudoun?”

“I haven’t seen him since my mother died. Her death completely broke him up, I believe. He was at the funeral, of course, and then he went straight

out to the Cape, where he died, as I said, last year."

"What is the first recollection you have of Mr. Loudoun? I don't think you told me that this morning."

Loudoun frowned. He did not answer for nearly two minutes. Then he said:

"I don't think I know. I've several recollections, but which one comes first I can't tell you."

"Are they pleasant recollections?"

"On the whole—yes. I remember being taken to the circus by him; I remember his giving me a shilling when I had my first tooth taken out; I remember his giving me a pretty good thrashing once when I ran away from my nurse and fell into a pond, and I remember his introducing me to a very tall man with a blond beard who terrified me by kissing me. But most of my recollections of him are pleasant."

"Terrified? Not exasperated?"

"Eh? Oh, the response to the bearded fellow? Terrified, I'm sure. I must have been very small, for I remember a distinct and a very strong feeling of horror and repulsion, and I have a recollection of the smell of aniseed, an odour for which I still feel the strongest dislike."

"I see," said Mrs. Bradley. So far, the man seemed willing enough to answer questions, but his material was not helpful. She changed the subject gradually, and Loudoun was soon telling her about his work as a consulting engineer. She left him at shortly after midnight, having invited herself to bed and breakfast at Craigullich. It was an arrangement which had disconcerted her imposed-upon, unwilling, and rather disgruntled host, but he could scarcely refuse her his roof.

She listened at her own door until she heard him close his, but she did not go to bed. Putting on a thick warm dressing-gown over all her clothes, and wearing fur-lined slippers, she crept to his door and seated herself in a very small alcove beside it. She had placed a small stool in the alcove, and had covered it with a cushion. Then, like a sinister guardian angel, she seated herself, pulled her dressing-gown about her, and waited in patience, attended only by her thoughts. The voice spoke at three in the morning.

Laura, having assembled her companions, led them from Ballachulish by the road which, following the margin of Loch Leven, led to the small

industrial town of Kinlochleven at the head of the loch where the little river Leven connects Loch Leven with the long stretch of Blackwater Reservoir.

It was a long walk. The road was narrow and hilly, and the party, particularly Jonathan, who was not an enthusiastic walker, were glad when the long treeless trek was ended and they came into the town in time for tea.

"What's that place over there?" asked Jonathan.

"The aluminium works," replied the lad Brian, who, like most boys of his age, was informed upon such matters.

"And now we *are* here, what do we do? I want my tea," said Deborah plaintively.

Laura could answer the question and mitigate her distress at one and the same time. Following the directions communicated by Dougal the Post to Mrs. Bradley and by her to Laura, she led the way to the house of one Janet Forbes who let holiday lodgings, and knocked boldly upon the door.

A majestic woman, imperially bearded, opened it, regarded the party shrewdly, and enquired what was to do. She then answered the question herself by adding that she supposed they were speiring after rooms.

"Only for two nights," said Laura.

"Ye'll wait," said the sibyl, retreating. She reappeared shortly and continued, "I'll take ye. All of ye wipe your boots, and if ye carry a stick wi' a wee spike ye'll leave it in the hall. I dinna have sticks upstairs."

They followed her through to the kitchen, a clean bright place which twinkled with brass and was warm with red curtains and a crimson overmantel decorated with a pale pink ball fringe, and were told to sit down whilst she planned out where she could put them.

"The place is downstairs for the gentlemen and upstairs for the ladies," continued their hostess, "and ye're no to neglect to pull the chain."

With this forthright introduction began a pleasant and instructive two days' holiday. Mrs. Forbes by (to use her own expression) 'ousting' a gentleman known as Number Six, and disposing of him elsewhere, contrived, with the aid of a camp-bed, to turn a large single room into a double room for Jonathan and young Brian, and Laura and Deborah, to whom she took an immediate and irrational fancy (whilst roundly declaring that her preference was, and had always been 'for laddies') she accommodated in a small but very clean room above the scullery. These necessary details settled, she provided her new guests with a tea of gargantuan size and infinite variety, and Laura, who felt that sufficient lead

had been given, embarked upon the subject of 'the laddies' Mrs. Forbes had known, and mentioned Loudoun.

In this she was carrying out instructions. According to Dougal the Post, Janet Forbes of Kinlochleven had been servant at Craigullich until her marriage. What was to be known about Hector Loudoun and his family presumably she would know. Whether she was prepared to share her knowledge had to be discovered, although it had not been determined, either, whether Loudoun had any objection to his family affairs being discussed with his old nurse.

The high tide of reminiscence, having come to full flood upon Janet Forbes' ready tongue, at last began to ebb, but this did not happen until Laura had had her fill of information. She treasured all she was told, made notes in private, and went to bed that night with the warm consciousness of a job well done and in the assurance that there was no more to learn and that on the morrow she might amuse herself as she pleased.

The story of the Loudoun family had been a curious one. She conned it over in bed. It satisfied various demands which the eager hearer was accustomed to make upon tales of pity and terror, and had, in addition, that delightful quality of melodrama without which the seeker after excitement is never completely happy.

When the ghost gave tongue, Mrs. Bradley's first impulse, and one to which she yielded, was to write down what it said. She was anxious to compare her own version of its remarks with that of Loudoun. She had seen the script, and Ian's précis of it had been excellent.

She switched on a tiny shaded electric lamp which cast light nowhere but on the page of the note-book to which it was attached, and scribbled busily.

"Hector! Hector! Hector! Another for Hector!" said the voice. It was low-pitched and very distinct. Mrs. Bradley's sense of hearing was keen and its natural acuteness had been trained. As she made her swift, illegible hieroglyphics with the speed of a shorthand writer (only the shorthand was of her own invention and for her individual use), she listened with more anxious attention to the voice of the ghost than was necessary had she been alert only to catch its spoken words. "They hanged me. What's *Hectorcuba* to him or he to *Hectorcuba?* Cuba? Where's Cuba? Over the hills and far away. Far away. I am far away. No, I am not far away. I am here at your

side, my son. You do not see me, but I am here. I am in the loch. I am in the loch. I am not in the loch. I am in the loch. They hanged me. This is near St. Andrews. A pleasant country. The hills are kind, are kind, are the kind hills."

The voice ceased. It had become more hoarse as its monotonous nonsense-statements went droning on. Mrs. Bradley switched off her tiny writing lamp, closed the notebook, stood, counted ten, and then switched on her larger torch. As she did this, the door of the room opened and Loudoun came stumbling out. His hair was wild and tousled, his eyes were staring open, his mouth hung horribly awry and he was shivering as though he had the ague. He did not appear to notice Mrs. Bradley. She said gently:

"It's all right. You can go back to bed. He won't come here any more."

Loudoun turned slowly and stared at her. Then he thrust his left hand through his hair, and stared again. She took him by the sleeve of his crumpled jacket and led him back to his room. It was in darkness. She shone her torch about the room, found his candle, and lighted it.

"Get into bed. You are cold," she said, speaking firmly. He obeyed her, lay down, and pulled the covers up to his chin. She waited until he shut his eyes. Then she brought the candle almost up to his face, looked at his dark unshaven chin, the shadows under his eyes, the set of his mouth, closed now, and the blue-black above his upper lip. He opened his eyes. She put the candle on the bedside table and seated herself on the bed.

"What did he say?" she enquired.

"I can't tell you," said Loudoun. "It was terrible. He threatened to come from Loch Slòigh, and drag me down to its depths."

"Was that all he said?" she persisted.

"All." He turned his face from the light. Mrs. Bradley went to the door, opened it wider—it had been left ajar—slipped through it and went to her room but did not attempt to go to sleep. The housekeeper brought her a cup of tea at seven, and the report that there was fog all over the moor and that Dougal Macpherson the Post would not reach the *clachan* that morning, let alone the house, with the letters.

"Was Mr. Loudoun expecting letters?" Mrs. Bradley, sipping the sweet strong tea, enquired.

He was always expecting letters, but when he had them he was no better pleased.

“Would Mr. Macpherson need to come by way of Loch Slòigh?” Mrs. Bradley enquired. The old woman stared at her aghast.

“Loch Slòigh? Where did you hear of Loch Slòigh, I am wondering? I am full of wonder that you should be saying that word.”

“Is it considered a difficult word to say?”

“It has a strange meaning,” said the housekeeper. “Will you be pleased to come away down to your breakfast? Will you eat porridge? And there will be bacon and haddock . . .”

“Morag, or, possibly, Minnie,” said Mrs. Bradley, “who comes here at night and talks to Mr. Loudoun, and is gone before the morning?”

“I am not knowing who comes, but come they do. I have heard them in the policies and among the bushes, rustling and slipping and hiding themselves like thieves. But who they are I do not know, and I have not heard any speaking. And my name, please you, is Ellen. I am nobody’s minnie.”

“In the policies and among the bushes,” repeated Mrs. Bradley thoughtfully. She recollected Hector Loudoun’s description of the man he had seen from his bedroom window.

“What is the name of the little loch?” she demanded. “The little loch out in the grounds?”

“It has no name,” said the old woman, looking at her closely.

“No name? That is unusual, isn’t it?”

“No, I am not knowing about that same. All I know is that I never heard a name given to it.”

“How long have you lived here?”

“I came to live here when Mr. Loudoun came.”

“Such a very short time?”

“Aye. I am from Craig Mellon.”

“Really?” said Mrs. Bradley. “That’s interesting.” She went downstairs to confront a wild-eyed, unshaven Loudoun.

“Ah,” she said, “I see you did not sleep. We will try a light hypnosis this morning, as soon as you have had breakfast.”

Chapter Four

★

Remember the death of Alpin!
Cuimhnich bas Ailpein!

War cry of the Mackinnons and of the MacAlpines

★

Laura returned by way of the rough, steep *larig* called the Devil's Staircase on to the road through Glencoe. To her right rose the grand stern peak of Eagath, and before her she could see the ramparts of the Glen, and, beyond the road that she would travel, the towering heights of Buchaille Etive Mor and Buchaille Etive Beag. She saw Buchaille Etive Beag from a different but not less impressive angle at the end of her tiring and difficult scramble over the Devil's Staircase, for she came towards the crossroads marked by the Kingshouse Inn, and, before she turned on to the old road through Glencoe to reach the inn, from where she proposed to explore a part of the moor of Rannoch, she crossed a heathery knoll to paddle in a burn filled with boulders and tiny cascades, and from here saw the noble mountain, massive, shapely, and steep, its sheer sides scarred handsomely with the spirting tracks of waterfalls which needed nothing but a shower to bring them to leaping life.

The knoll was wine-coloured, purple, and yellow. At its foot, near the burn, was rough, coarse grass, and then came the bare, sharp, and tumbled stones which marked the course of the stream. It was shrunken with the dryness of early summer, but under a sudden escarpment, where a miniature cliff was lifted to make a plateau, the water ran cold and deep, and here Laura waded and loitered, putting off the time of departure for the sake of pleasant dalliance in paddling.

The rest of her party had made up their minds to return to Ballachulish along the northern shore of calm Loch Leven. She did not envy them, but pictured them tramping along, a slightly ironic Jonathan, who loathed to walk, a Deborah looking cool and clean whatever the dust or the heat or the difficulties of the way, and a philosophic Brian, who, at thirteen, affected to expect but little of life in general, and who contrived, in his own quiet, hedonist, almost Narcissan fashion, to realize his desires and to crown his wishes.

At last she came out of the burn, having bruised her foot on a large stone half-buried in its bed. She dried her feet on the little bathing-towel she invariably carried with her (being one of those holidaymakers in everlasting quest of water in which to paddle, bathe, or swim) and scrambled back on to the road.

The inn was on the borders of Rannoch Moor. This moor was a wild waste of peat-moss, the extremity of desolation. The moor was on high ground and the railway from Fort William ran round it, coming south from Tulloch and down to Rannoch station, distant a dozen miles or so from the inn.

There was room at the inn. It was not the season of tourists. She found accommodation, washed, had lunch, rested for half an hour on her bed, and then set out to have a look at the moor before dark. She would have liked to get as far as Rannoch Loch, but it was too far distant from Kingshouse. There were other lochs, desolate and remote, but, although she admired their setting of sombre hills, dark trees, the lighter birches, and the melancholy peat-bogs and whispering, dreary reeds, they had not that appeal to her imagination which the mere name of Rannoch Loch could give.

"Till ye talk Rannoch Loch to the top of Schiehallion . . ."

Schiehallion rose behind the low hills fringing the loch, a beautiful, almost symmetrical peak with one long slope and another shorter, slightly sharper one, which rose behind a crude shoulder of wooded hillside rising dark from the water's edge.

There was something of magic about Schiehallion. It was a fairy peak. Miles of stiff climbing might be had on its cliffs and larigs, but its peak looked fantastically delicate as it rose to a flawless point against the light grey of the sky.

On the opposite shore of Loch Rannoch were reeds and graceful birches. The windswept waters were washed in long, bright wakes that slanted across the loch, and burns tumbled in from the hills as though there were sudden surf on the placid stretches.

But these romantic glories were not for Laura. She could not reach Loch Rannoch in the time at her disposal.

Not altogether happy, for the solitude and lonely mystery of the moor had had a depressing effect upon her spirits, she had to return to the inn. The new road through Glencoe had by-passed Kingshouse, and it was left among the heather beside the almost disused Old Road that wound with serpentine bends between steep, rough cliffs and the ramparts of overhanging fastnesses.

Before she could reach the crossroads, however, at which four roads joined, one to Glencoe, another to Rannoch Station, the third, which forked three miles on, putting an arm on either side of Loch Tulla and leading to Bridge of Orchy and Dalmally, and the fourth, branching off into tracks down both sides of Loch Etive, she encountered a little procession which at first she took to be a Highland funeral. She stopped to let it go by.

It was not a funeral procession, however, although four men were carrying a fifth, and the fifth was dead. He was wrapped in a shepherd's plaid and his face was covered. The four men carried him into a shepherd's hut.

Laura, whose first reaction, during the beginning of her employment as Mrs. Bradley's secretary and assistant, was to connect the fact of death with the theory of murder, followed the men to the door. There was a peat fire burning in the middle of the hut. The grave-faced men laid their burden carefully on the floor, and one removed the scarf from its face.

Laura walked into the hut. In accordance with a promise made to her mother, she always carried a small first-aid outfit when she was tramping. She went up to the group—four steps across the hard earth floor of the hut—and said abruptly, before they had noticed her entrance:

"First-aid wanted? I've got some bandages and things." One of the men looked up quickly, and scrambled up from his kneeling position by the body.

"You mustn't come here!" he cried.

"Why on earth not?" asked Laura, pushing him aside and taking the position which he had just abandoned. Then she saw what he meant.

Something which seemed to be protruding from the shoulders of the corpse was causing it to lie in a slightly tilted, entirely unnatural position on the floor. Laura, watched by the men, turned the body sideways and saw the hilt of a knife.

"Oh, I see," she said. "But you needn't mind my seeing him. I shan't faint." She looked closely at the dead man's face. "I don't know him. Who is he?" A man she took to be the shepherd to whom the hut belonged, answered slowly, in careful English:

"No one here knows him. The laird and I were finding him on the moor."

"There's nothing we can do for him," said the man who had first spoken. "I would advise you to get on your way. There's a mist coming up. That is, if you've satisfied your rather unnecessary curiosity."

Laura regarded him with dislike.

"As I suppose it was by your orders this man was moved from where you found him," she retorted, "it is likely that you'll have to explain to the police exactly why you chose to bring him here. You must have known he was dead. What's more . . ." She jerked her head towards the body. The man stared a moment.

"A word with you outside," he said abruptly. Laura, who thought that she might be able to gather where the body had been found so that she could report this important fact to Mrs. Bradley, went out with him.

"Look here," he said, "I can see you've got your head screwed on pretty tight. Have you any medical knowledge? Are you a nurse or a medical student, or anything?"

"I know a bit about dead bodies," said Laura cautiously and with some amount of truth. "Why? What do you want to know?"

"I wondered how long this fellow had been dead."

"I didn't see enough of him to be able to say," replied Laura. "Let's go and have another look. Not that what we say will carry much weight. The police will have their own doctor."

She was very anxious to get another look at the body. Something about the man's mouth had touched a chord in her memory. A second inspection of the body—the men making way for her this time—did not help her to determine the time of death. She knew little of *rigor mortis,* and, in any case, knew that she must not touch the body until the police had seen it.

The news had reached the inn by the time she got there. The body had been found not far from the track which led to Kingshouse from Rannoch Station at the head of Loch Lydoch.

"Had it been on that track (that isn't a track) from Carrour," said one of the guests, an Englishman named Farraway, "one wouldn't be much surprised. More than one tramp has failed to report at Kinlochleven who decided to try a short cut across the moor."

"The dead man was a tramp, then?" asked Laura. The afternoon was drawing in and was misty and chilly, and the company, such as it was, was round the fire, and conversation was general.

"I don't know. I assumed he was. I can't say that was mentioned. They've got the chap down at the shepherd's hut, over on the moor, about two and a half miles south-west of these cross-roads."

Laura did not mention that she had seen him.

"They may want us all to have a look at him," interpolated another of the party. "Identification, you know."

"How long had he been dead?" enquired Laura. The men stared and then laughed. Her matter-of-fact tone and manner seemed to them incongruous.

"We don't know that, either. The police will bring their own doctor, I suppose," said one of them.

Laura nodded, but again did not say that she had been at the hut. What reason she had had at first for wishing to see the body she herself would have been hard put to it to tell, but she was very glad now that she had insisted upon looking at the corpse. The most remarkable thing about the dead man was that his middle front tooth was missing. It might be coincidence, no more, but in view of Loudoun's description of Mr. Ure, it seemed well worth while to add it to the report which she had prepared for Mrs. Bradley.

Next morning she set out early for Ballachulish along the old road through Glencoe. There were long miles to be covered before she reached the glen. The great Shepherds of Etive—Buchaille Etive Mor and Buchaille Etive Beag—the Three Sisters, Beinn Fhada, Gearr Aonach, and Aonach Dubh, Stob Coire an Lochain behind the last two, and, further to the south, the mighty monarch Bidean nam Bian, rose beside and before her on the south. To the north the road was walled by the rampart-strength of the

double-peaked Aonach Eagath and, nearer to quiet Loch Leven, the Pap of Glencoe.

The Glen was wild and gloomy, even on that bright summer morning, and it was with a thrill of excitement not far removed from fear that she took the road between its austere and almost overhanging mountains.

To Mrs. Bradley's disguised but very real surprise, Loudoun made no objection whatever when she suggested that she could best complete her diagnosis by putting him under light hypnosis. He seemed interested in the suggestion, and asked several questions about hypnotism and its place in the treatment of mental and nervous diseases.

"We'd better have your room with the Menzies portrait," she said, when she had given him enough information to satisfy him. "If you will sit down in a comfortable chair, and, as far as possible—but don't worry too much about this side of it; it doesn't matter much—clear your mind as though you were tidying a room, that will best provide the atmosphere we need. By the way, how would you tidy a room?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Loudoun, seating himself and leaning back comfortably in his chair. "I'm afraid I'm the sort of untidy beggar who would just shove the rubbish behind cushions and things. I mean, sweeping and dusting and a general turn-out would be beyond my scope, I'm sure."

"Shove the rubbish behind cushions and things . . . well, that's what you do mentally, too, I expect. Many people are the same. But, you see, one can only do that for a certain length of time. There comes a point when, in the room, the cushions can hide no more rubbish. The mind is the same. Then, because moth and rust do corrupt, queer things, and very unpleasant things, are apt to crawl out. That happened, didn't it, to you? When did it begin? When did you begin concealing your unpleasant thoughts from yourself? Think back, and tell me."

"It was when I was three," said Loudoun readily. "My father died. I was with him. I mean, I saw his dead body."

"Your father's dead body? Nonsense! I thought your father was hanged. Whose dead body *did* you see?"

"My father's. I know it was. He was lying by the side of the loch, under the small clump of birch trees. His right arm was in the mud at the edge of the loch. It had been hot that summer. The water had dried away

from the edge of the loch. His face was staring straight up into the sky, and his eyes were open. I found him."

"And he had been murdered?"

"He had a great gash across his throat. It was a dreadful sight."

"So he was not hanged. He was murdered without benefit of clergy. You interest me intensely. Now then! Who murdered him?"

"Rory Loudoun. He wanted to marry my mother. I knew that, too. I had seen her in his arms."

"So Rory Loudoun was hanged for murdering your father?"

"I don't know. I was never told anything about it."

"Then who was it brought you up?"

"My mother, and Rory Loudoun."

"How much did old Minnie know?" demanded Mrs. Bradley, abruptly abandoning the cross-talk.

He looked startled, and sat up straight.

"She knows nothing! She wouldn't remember!"

"Suppose she did remember; what could she tell?"

He subsided again, and breathed easily.

"Nothing. Whatever she remembered, there is nothing that she could tell. How did you come to hear of old Morag's old wives' tales?"

"Your name is Hector Menzies?" said Mrs. Bradley, leaning forward and holding his wrist.

"Alexander Stewart. I am Alexander Stewart."

"And you talk to yourself in the night and pretend to be your father?"

"How could I do that? I tell you my father is dead."

"Yes, he is dead. We know that. Tell me about your mother and Rory Loudoun."

"I can't, unless I tell you of Tobermory."

"Tell me of Tobermory. What happened there?"

"It's in the books, but they don't know everything."

Mrs. Bradley sighed and put away her notebook. She looked at the gently-breathing man for a minute or two, and then left him and went to find the twice-christened housekeeper.

Laura, in spite of her feelings, mingled of dread and excitement, as she followed the old road winding through Glencoe, met nobody but a painter, who, having set up his easel in a tiny corrie well above the road, was

painting the available scenery with nervous inconsequence. She sat down on a pile of loose stones by the wayside and watched him. All the time she was there—twenty minutes, perhaps, for she smoked a very leisurely cigarette and ate some chocolate—he did not do more than the merest touching up of his work. She was curious to know what sort of a job he was making of the stream-savaged side of Aonach, and wondered how much her presence would be resented if she climbed to the corrie and asked to be permitted to look at the painting.

She was wondering whether it was worth the trouble of the climb when the artist stood up, looked at his work, then came to the edge of the bluff and waved his hand. Laura looked back along the road as far as she could see, and then forward towards the west, but there was no one. She could only conclude that the man was trying to attract her attention. She stood up, pointed to herself and then at him. He waved again. This time without doubt it was to her, for he made motions for her to join him. Laura scrambled up the bluff, and then in the track of the dried-up waterfall, until she reached the small flat pinnacle of rock whereon he had set up his easel and little stool.

"Good morning," she said. "What's the matter?"

The man, bearded but otherwise tidy, put his brush between his teeth and beckoned her to look at the picture. They both stood and stared at it in silence.

"Well?" said the man.

"Very nice," said Laura judicially. "Rather too much coloratura about the tabasco, though. And the alignment of the epigasteric. Somewhat concentric, don't you think?"

"I never use that jargon. Don't understand it," said the man. Laura thought this scarcely surprising. "The point is, is it like, or not like, would you say? Speaking as the man in the street. And what's your name?"

"I never do," said Laura reassuringly. "But, if I must, where is the stag, and where are the Highland cattle? Menzies."

"If you're so well up in art, you ought to be a bit more helpful," said the man. "There's something wrong somewhere, but, for the life of me, I can't see what it is." He grimaced, then smiled, his white teeth seeming whiter through the beard. "What *is* it, Miss Menzies?"

Laura could have told him, but she preferred to keep the news for Mrs. Bradley.

“Actually,” she said, “it isn’t too bad. It looks like a mountain, and that’s the great thing, isn’t it?”

“No. The great thing is, I suppose, that you might possibly spare a cigarette. I’ve run out, and it’s the devil of a nuisance just here. I do want to get this finished before I leave, and if I go tramping into Ballachulish, or somewhere, for fags, I shall lose the best of the light.”

Laura gave him her cigarettes and matches, bade him goodbye, and resumed her journey full of thought, excitement, and foreboding. She joined Mrs. Bradley at Craigullich in time for tea. She had lunched at the Ballachulish hotel, opposite the ferry across Loch Leven, and had had a rest and a good talk with Deborah and Jonathan. The boy Brian, who had returned with Jonathan and his wife on the previous day, whilst Laura went on to Kingshouse, was fishing from a boat on the loch in company with the innkeeper’s nephew, one Alan Macquarrie, on holiday from school.

She found Mrs. Bradley by the loch, in rapt contemplation of its stillness, and enjoying, at the same time, her tea. Loudoun, said Mrs. Bradley, was still asleep. He had slept since lunch.

“We had a séance together,” said Mrs. Bradley with a ghoulish chuckle, handing tea and indicating the various plates and dishes, “and, except for the period during which he lunched—with excellent appetite, I might say—he has been asleep ever since. By the way, the old housekeeper thinks I’m mad to want tea out of doors.”

“You hypnotized him?”

“No, child.”

“I thought that was part of the treatment.”

“So did I. Mr. Loudoun decided not to avail himself of that part. He affected to fall in with my plans, but he was no more under the influence of hypnosis than I was, except for a minute or two at the very end.”

“How do you know he was hypnotized at the end?”

“He gave me some information I wanted. It was something he could not have meant to tell me, I think.”

“Well, look here, something else has blown up. A man has been found murdered on Rannoch Moor.”

“Murdered? Is that certain?”

“Anyway, stabbed in the back. I know it’s true, because I’ve seen him. Some idiots moved him from where he was found and brought him to a shepherd’s hut not far from the Glencoe road. It was well-meant, I suppose,

but a bit of a sell for the police. Four men. I didn't know any of them. One was a shepherd, one the laird, and the other two, I should say, were quarrymen over from north of the moor. Silly asses. Wouldn't you think they'd know better than to touch a dead body?"

"What do you think they thought of doing with the body?"

"I suppose one of them was going to fetch the police. A mist was coming up, so I thought I'd better be going. I don't know the moor, and I didn't want to get lost, so I made tracks back to the inn. How have *you* been getting on? Apart from the hypnotism, I mean."

"Negatively speaking, very well."

"Meaning? I know you said just now that he refused to be hypnotized. . . ."

"He gave verbal consent, child, and then had the impudence to give me nonsense-answers to my questions, except, as I said, at the end."

"But he wanted help pretty badly. He was really scared about this ghost-business, Ian said, and there is not much doubt but that he thinks that man at the country club intended to injure or kill him."

"Agreed. The Loudoun whom Ian and Catherine met certainly did require help, and, equally certainly, obtained it; but the Loudoun I interviewed and agreed to treat wants no interference whatever in his concerns. What do you make of that?"

"You can't mean they're not the same person?"

"Well, child, all I can tell you is that there is very little doubt that, for some reason still unknown to me, this Mr. Loudoun is now as anxious to get rid of strangers from his policies as the other one longed for company."

"Then there *are* two of them. That's queer. And another queer thing—although probably it's just coincidence—you remember that when he was talking to Ian about that man who tried to buy the glen, Hector Loudoun told him that the man had a gap in his top front teeth?"

"Do you tell me . . . ?"

"Yes. The corpse from Rannoch Moor had a gap in his top front teeth—very noticeable, too."

"And very convenient, you think. Well, we shall see; although, as you also point out, it may mean nothing. Well, now for Mrs. Forbes' tale. How does it bear on what Mr. Loudoun has given us?"

"Well, I don't know. Anyway, here it is, for what it's worth. The writing's a bit wobbly, because I wrote most of it lying in the heather

yesterday and to-day. I didn't want Mrs. Forbes to think I was taking too much notice of what she said. She's a nice soul, and I'd hate her to think I was pumping her about her early life and her employers' affairs."

"Quite," said Mrs. Bradley gravely. Whilst Laura, having finished her tea, lay sprawled by the lakeside, she seated herself with her back very upright against one of the silver birches and commenced to read Laura's notes and comments.

They were not to be left very long in peace, however. She had scarcely turned the page when Laura said softly, snapping a twig between her long, strong fingers:

"Look out. Here's Loudoun coming."

Mrs. Bradley folded the notes and stowed them away as the master of the house came up.

"I didn't know the post had been here to-day," he said. Mrs. Bradley looked up and smiled, and then patted the ground beside her.

"Sit down," she said. "The post didn't come here, but Laura brought me some stuff for which I had asked."

"Ah? How did you find the rest of your party?" he enquired of Laura.

"Oh, enjoying life. You look better, yourself. They laze and eat, and eat and laze. You ought to try it," she answered flippantly. "I say, can I bathe in your loch?"

"It is most unlucky to do so!" Loudoun answered. "Please yourself, of course, but I have heard that people who bathed in it always got drowned."

"What, in the loch itself? It doesn't look deep."

"Not necessarily. But that is how they died—being drowned." He began to stroll back towards the house.

"Was there a sinister ring about those words, or am I mistaken?" muttered Laura. Mrs. Bradley called after him:

"Drowned? Not stabbed in the back?"

"Stabbed in the back?" He looked round, obviously startled. "What do you mean by that? Who's been stabbed in the back? What are you talking about?"

"It will be in the papers to-morrow," Laura remarked. She glanced at Mrs. Bradley, received a nod, and went on: "A man has been murdered, I think, on Rannoch Moor. A man with a gap between his teeth."

"Really?" He seemed elaborately unimpressed. "That should cause a sensation. So little happens up here. It'll last us for years."

“Like the murder of James Stewart of the Glen,” said Laura carelessly. The effect of these words was startling. Loudoun swung round at the sound of them, his mouth awry with dismay. He gripped her arm. Then, meeting her young, sardonic eyes, he shrugged, let go, and concentrated his attention upon the little old woman beside him.

“You shouldn’t have tried to deceive me,” Mrs. Bradley pointed out patiently. “It is easy to see that your nerves are in a very bad state. The best thing I can do is to recommend you to a friend of mine, a specialist in nervous diseases, a famous man. It will not be far to go. He lives in Edinburgh.”

“You are giving me up, then?” He looked relieved. “I thought you would.”

“Oh, yes,” she answered carelessly. “Without perfect mutual confidence between pyschiatrist and patient, there can be no permanent cure of an aberration as serious as your own.”

He shrugged again, laughed, and walked quickly into the house. Mrs. Bradley resumed her reading of Laura’s notes, but had not got far before the girl remarked thoughtfully:

“Why should James Stewart have given him quite such a jolt?”

“I don’t know,” said Mrs. Bradley, resuming her reading.

The story that Janet Forbes had told Laura amounted to this:

Craigullich was built on the site of another house burned down by Cumberland’s soldiers helped by members of the Clan Campbell. The old house had belonged to the MacDonalds, but permission was obtained for a new house to be put up by the Alan Campbell who had burned down the previous one. This new house had been laid under a curse by the only surviving member of the family of the original owners, an old woman called Morag MacDonald who was subsequently drowned as a witch by order of the same Alan Campbell. Her prophecy that the house would never prosper was borne out, so far as local belief went, when the house was struck by lightning in the year 1818, to remain a blackened ruin until it was sold in 1854 to a certain Donald Stewart (afterwards called ‘of Craigullich’), who rebuilt it and lived in it, and left it to his descendants.

There was a further prophecy that no good would come to the house if any of the Campbell clan ever set foot across the threshold and never a Campbell had (according to Janet Forbes) until the black day near the end of the war of 1914–1918 when Malcolm Stewart, a man of thirty-eight,

father of a lovely little boy only three years of age at the time, came back unexpectedly on leave and found a brother officer, David Loudoun, in the house. He had killed him.

There were no extenuating circumstances that could be proved, although there was local rumour of a duel. There was no evidence to show that the man was his wife's lover or that he even supposed that he was. The wife was not in the house at the time of the murder. The defendant was found guilty and was hanged in November, 1918, less than a fortnight after the end of the war. His son was then not four years of age. Only a year later his widow married Roderick Loudoun, elder brother of the murdered man. Tongues wagged. It was said that Stewart had shot the wrong brother, and the neighbourhood became so uncomfortable that Rory Loudoun took his wife abroad, leaving young Stewart, a delicate, nervous child, with a governess until he was ten. Then the boy went to school near London, spending his holidays with an aunt. The parents did not return to England or Scotland, but remained abroad, and Lorna Stewart (then Lorna Loudoun) died. Loudoun returned once, after her death, to Craigullich, but afterwards emigrated. The boy inherited Craigullich. There had been rumours of a boy born to Lorna whilst her first husband, Stewart, had been in Mesopotamia, a boy who could not have been Stewart's child. But nothing was known definitely, and the illegitimate child had never been seen at Craigullich. Lorna, however, had spent a year in England during her husband's absence.

"And now," said Laura, observing that Mrs. Bradley had finished reading, "what are we going to do about it? One queer thing is the name. Why bring Menzies into it if the name is really Stewart? And if we're right, and there are two Loudouns, where does the second one come in? And, on another tack, what has happened to little Stewart, the owner of Craigullich? Is Ian's Mr. Loudoun really Stewart? And, if so, is our Mr. Loudoun the illegitimate son of Lorna Stewart—or her legitimate son after she married Rory Loudoun? Or what? Oh, and Janet says she doesn't know of any old woman called Morag at Craigullich, unless I mean mad Morag from the *clachan,* who was 'led astray' as a young woman and never got over it. She blames Rory Loudoun for that, too."

Chapter Five

★

Black-Willow Hill.
Cnoc Eolachain.

War cry of the Colquhouns

★

"By the way," added Laura, as they drove back in the hired car, "I met a mad artist to-day. I'm sure he must have been mad because he did not seem to know that all the muck I talked about his painting was so much gibberish. Besides, it wasn't his painting he was doing."

"It wasn't his painting, child? How do you mean? And where was this?"

"In Glencoe, along the old road, after I'd passed Loch Treochatan. He was up on a ledge at the slope of a corrie."

"And what was that about his painting?"

"It was a finished painting—in oils. His paint was water-colour, and he wasn't using it, anyway. He was only dabbing water on the picture. I got away from him as soon as I could. I don't mind risking a rough and tumble with the average person if they're bent on making themselves a nuisance, but I do draw the line at madmen. I gave him my cigarettes and matches and beat it with what graceful speed I might. I hope he won't use the matches to fire the heather or something."

"You seem to be having all the adventures," said Mrs. Bradley mildly. "How would you like to go to the Inverness Conference and read them my paper on the *Psychology of the Re-Orientation of Paranoiacs?"*

"Not at all," said Laura grimacing. "Is it an order?"

"If you like. Somebody had better read it, and you would have a startling effect on a learned gathering, I fancy. It gives me pleasure to think

of it."

"Yes, it might be a rag," Laura grudgingly agreed. "But, look here, if I do go . . ."

"You shan't miss any of the excitement here," said Mrs. Bradley. "You shall go with me every step of the way. It will only mean two days away from Ballachulish, unless you like to stay away longer."

"They'll be the days when everything will happen," said Laura, a trifle despondently.

"I think everything *has* happened," Mrs. Bradley observed. But in this she happened to be wrong.

"Which day do you want me to go?" Laura presently enquired.

"I don't know yet. I'll wire from Ballachulish to-morrow and find out from the secretary. If he leaves it to me, we'll say Wednesday, unless you've any particular objection."

"It doesn't matter to me when it is, as long as I get it over soon. I shall be as nervous as a cat until I'm through with it. You'll have to go over the stuff with me, and show me how to bring out the points you want to make, and how to pronounce the scientific terms. How old Kitty and Alice would laugh!" She laughed herself, a great deal more cheerfully. "What do you really make of Loudoun?" she enquired. "And do you think the corpse on Rannoch Moor could be Mr. Ure, and that Loudoun murdered him?—*our* Loudoun, I mean. Is that why one has disappeared, and this one has taken his place?"

"I am not clairvoyant, child."

"Well, what's the next step, anyway?"

"I see Ballachulish ferry before us. Our interests for the moment lie upon Rannoch Moor, but we cannot go there until to-morrow. Drive straight to the hotel. To-morrow we will take Jonathan with us to the place where the body was found."

"If we can locate it. You haven't seen Rannoch Moor, have you?"

From Ballachulish they took the new road through Glencoe, but not until Monday. It was not considered in keeping with local feeling to hire a car on the Sabbath. The new road, sombre but bold, shortened the distance through the frowning, majestic glen by having been cut through the rocks of the hillside and over the boulder-strewn fastnesses.

The road, when Kingshouse was reached, did not cross the moor. The blank, unfriendly scenery was darkly terrifying. Heather, bracken, and blackish bogs alternated with one another and with stretches of bright-green moss and peat-brown tarns. Sheep-tracks led in various directions through the heather, and at a short distance along the track they followed was the shepherd's hut.

Laura stopped the car and remained in it, whilst Mrs. Bradley and Jonathan got out and went up to the hut. It was empty, and the door stood open. Within were the embers of a peat-fire still smoking and smouldering, and covered with fine white ash. Jonathan stirred the sods with his feet. Mrs. Bradley switched on her powerful electric torch and had a look at the floor. Then she went outside the hut and called to Laura:

"Let Jonathan sit in the car. He can toot the horn to guide us back to it if we happen to get lost on the moor. You come with me. Your eyes are younger than mine. A pity you're not a girl guide. You would be more accustomed to tracking. Come along, and we'll try to find out exactly where the body was discovered. Now we can assume, I think, that the bearers followed a sheep track. . . ."

"Yes. It was this one," said Laura. She led the way to the right. "I saw them come along here. . . ."

It was easy enough, as it happened, to hit upon the place. The bracken was heavily trampled, as though by the boots of a *posse* of the local constabulary, and this gave the most definite indication that the right spot had been reached. More careful and detailed searching revealed the possible presence of bloodstains on the surrounding bracken. Mrs. Bradley collected fronds and bore them tenderly back to the car. Having secreted them in a vasculum, she returned to Laura, who was on her stomach on the bracken trying to measure footprints.

There were none that Mrs. Bradley could see, but, with the amount of bog and soft peaty soil which lay round and about on the moor, she thought it might be possible to discover from which direction both victim and murderer had come, and in which direction the murderer had disappeared.

But for the theory that the murdered man might be Hector Loudoun's sinister acquaintance Mr. Ure, she would not have meddled in the business, especially as she had no official standing, but since Loudoun's affairs seemed to be connected in some way with Ure, it was a reasonable surmise that the death of Ure might have some interest for anyone interested in

Loudoun. At any rate, it was difficult to infer that harm could come of trying to solve a problem of time, place, and direction. Time remained an unknown factor until the doctors' reports were made public; place was fairly well established, and direction might possibly be determined by the use of a mixture of reconstructive reasoning, imagination, and observation.

Employing these faculties as best they might, Mrs. Bradley and Laura searched diligently and thought hard, and, by the frequent comparison of ideas, established, at the most, an unsatisfactory and far from helpful hypothesis that the murderer might have crossed the moor on foot, but was just as likely to have been in a car or even on horseback.

"It's no good," said Laura despairingly, at the end of an hour and a quarter of fruitless guesswork, "he might have come from anywhere and gone off anywhere else. I vote we give this up and wait for the newspaper report."

She returned to the car, sat down discouraged upon the running-board and lit a cigarette.

"Tired?" asked Jonathan sympathetically. "I could have told you it wasn't much good. You couldn't hope to track anything less noticeable than an elephant over ground like this, and even an elephant could only leave a trail if he took the trouble to tread in all the bogs. It isn't like Aunt Adela to waste her time. Is it just her way of getting some fresh air, do you think, or is she really working out something else all the time she's here?"

Laura did not know the answer to this question.

"Sherlock Holmes could have found the right footprints," she remarked dispiritedly. Mrs. Bradley was not gifted according to the Holmes standards of observation and deduction. She was not, either, sorry to be rid, for a short time, of her youthful Watson. The business of following a trail across Rannoch Moor she rightly believed to be the business of the police. Her search had another end in view, and one which she was not anxious, at present, to communicate to her assistant. It had struck her that something interesting and important would be decided if it could be shown how long the two men had been in company with one another before the actual moment of the murder. It was not feasible to suppose that an exact meeting-place could have been agreed upon in view of the nature and extent of the moor, and therefore she deduced that the murderer and his victim must have met somewhere else, the one with his intention cloaked by the disguise of

friendliness and the other unsuspecting and deceived, or else that the meeting had been the result of the purest chance.

If the men had come together, the police should be able, by making public a description of the murdered man, to discover whether the two had come from the direction of Kingshouse or from Rannoch Station, and, from this information, with any luck, to track them to their original starting point. If the men had met by accident—a remote and unlikely contingency unless the motive of the murder had been robbery—the murderer might never be discovered unless there was sufficient circumstantial evidence to justify the arrest of someone who was known to have borne the murdered man a grudge. It was unlikely in the extreme that any witness had seen them together upon the lonely wastes of the moor.

She proceeded, therefore, upon the assumption that the two men had driven, ridden or walked in one another's company across the moor, and it remained to discover whether there was any reason for the choice of the particular spot on which the body had been found.

She returned to it and studied it again. The most interesting immediate conclusion to which she had come was emphasised by this second inspection. It seemed clear that, whatever the motive of the murderer had been in so deciding, his intention had been that the body should be discovered as soon as possible. The trampled, bruised, and broken bracken fronds among which the body had lain were less than a yard from the broadest sheep-track leading to the shepherd's hut. There was no doubt that, in selecting this spot, the murderer had accepted some risk of being discovered by the shepherd, even in the very act of the killing, and Mrs. Bradley pondered this point for some time, but decided that the risk was probably negligible, as that part of the moor was comparatively open, and he would have known when the shepherd was approaching. She returned to the car and asked Laura to drive her straight back to Craigullich. It could be, she had decided, that the death of Ure (if Ure it proved to be) might have been intended to reassure the nerve-ridden Loudoun, wherever he might be. If this were so, then the discovery of the body before it had reached a stage of decay so advanced as to make identification slow, difficult or uncertain, was essential to the murderer's plan.

It followed, from this, that if the death of Ure were intended to reassure (or, conversely, of course, to terrify) Loudoun, then Loudoun must

know far more about Ure than he had written down on the puzzling script he had given Ian to read, and which was now in her own safe keeping.

The more she thought about the script, the more she was convinced that it had been shown to Ian to keep him at the house, and downstairs. It must have been prepared for the reading of any visitor whom Loudoun had happened to inveigle to the house that evening. Everything about it was suspect.

There was also the question of old Morag's disappearance. It was true that she might have left Craigullich of her own free will, and she might have left in the morning. There was the strong supposition, however, that she might have left overnight, or been enticed or ordered away, or even kidnapped.

If, however, the Loudouns—one or both—had been concerned in the murder of Ure, if Ure it was, why have mentioned him specifically in the script? It was necessary to know when the murdered man had died before some of these queries could be answered.

Were the Loudouns really brothers, she wondered, and were they in collusion? Could the terrors of the Loudoun Ian had met have been occasioned by the fact that he was giving his brother an alibi for the time of the murder?

She was getting far beyond her data, she knew, in arguing thus, and yet she could not believe that Ian's Loudoun and her own were one and the same person. She could not prove that there were two Loudouns, but the presumptive evidence was strong. She felt that if only she had proof she could go to the police, for, in view of the typescript, there might be something to gain by confronting one or other of the brothers with Ure's body.

She had not yet proved that it *was* Ure's body. She fully realized that. She resolved that if it proved not to be Ure she would wash her hands of the case. The trouble was that she did not see how to get the body identified. For one thing, Loudoun might have used a false name in the script. There need be no such person as Ure. A wild theory as to the identity of the murdered man had come to her, but she felt that she was theorizing too much already for a new theory—and a fantastic one—to be acceptable. Still, she docketed it for future reference. If it turned out to be not a theory but a fact, then the whole story of the Stewarts and the Loudouns would shake itself into place and make sober if cold-blooded sense.

There remained the question of who the Loudouns could be. She thought she knew the answer to this. Gossip rarely lied, although it frequently embroidered and distorted. It was likely that Janet Forbes had told all she knew. It was also quite probable that she had withheld scandal from what she would consider to be Laura Menzies' young ears. It was more than possible that, far from shooting the wrong brother, Malcolm Stewart had shot the man who had broken into his life. Rory Loudoun might be innocence itself, but it was unlikely that his younger brother had been guiltless.

The evidence, according to Janet Forbes, who seemed to be (but, of course, might not be) an independent, unbiased witness, was in favour of the supposition that Lorna Stewart and the younger brother of Rory Loudoun had been in London together during the absence of Malcolm Stewart in Mesopotamia, and that Lorna had had a child. There was nothing against the theory that she might have had twins. The difficulty that presented itself, if this were the case, was, simply, that if Ure in the typescript meant Stewart in real life, why had Stewart, or Ure, not been in possession of Craigullich, his natural inheritance? How had the Loudouns obtained possession of the house and land, and why had Stewart to importune Loudoun to sell to him property which was already his own?

Chapter Six

★

Up with the white and red!
Geal is Dearg a snas!

War cry of the Clan Menzies

★

Laura proceeded blithely to Inverness by way of Kyle of Lochalsh, Loch Carron, Achnasheen, Loch Linchart, and Loch Garve. Strathpeffer and Dingwall led her to the shore of the Beauly Firth and thence to the ancient city on the Ness with its wooded islands. It was a most delightful journey. The rugged coasts by the Kyle of Lochalsh, the lovely shores of Loch Carron, the smooth and tender waters of Linchart and Garve contrasted with the quiet mountains of the central highlands and the grey tumbled seas of the Firth.

The hostel was easy enough to find. She had time to identify it before dinner, and went to bed full of plans for a splendid day when she should have fulfilled her mission by reading Mrs. Bradley's paper before the learned doctors and divines who had come to hear it, and had time to spend for herself.

She discovered, when she reported herself at six o'clock in the evening as Mrs. Bradley's representative, that one of the best bedrooms at the hostel had been allotted to her. This was a turret room with two windows on the long wall and another window where the long and the short walls joined. It was a double room, but the second bed had been pushed into a corner and there was left covered with a dust-sheet patterned in the centre with a large thistle worked in pink.

She changed her tweed suit for a frock, and strolled out into the grounds. The modest card of events which she had found upon the

mantelpiece informed her that supper would be served in the refectory at eight o'clock. She was ready by half-past seven, and, not knowing quite what to do with herself for the following three-quarters of an hour, she attached herself to the old gardener, who was tending his strawberry plants.

His name was MacMillan and he was ready enough to talk. Laura introduced herself, and her Highland surname, it seemed, was a passport to his regard.

"We have all sorts here," said the gardener. "In the months of June and early July, the professors. In late July and for the whole of August, schoolteachers and others on tour, *doing* the Highlands."

His voice was eloquent. Laura nodded and waited. He went on with his work, however, under the impression that he had conveyed all that he meant to convey. After about ten minutes Laura observed.

"And what is it like at Easter? Better or worse?"

"Och! Losh! Dear, dear!"

The combination of the Highland and the Lowland exaggerations and emendations was too much for Laura. She laughed with a lack of moderation which, for some reason, won the old gardener's approval.

"Ye may well say," said he, looking, so far as one of such patriarchal aspect could contrive to do, extremely pleased with her. "I could say more," he added, darkly.

"I'm sure you could," agreed Laura. "I've come instead of Mrs. Bradley," she added, feeling that the conversation ought not to be allowed to die down in case it proved impossible to resussitate it.

"Mrs. Bradley?" He looked up, interested. "Well, well! That would not be Professor Beatrice Adela Lestrange Bradley who is after writing the psycho-analytical treatises on nervo-psychopathology, would it now?"

"The same," said Laura solemnly.

"And ye are representing her at the Conference?"

"Aye."

"Well, well!" He scanned her narrowly, a trowel in his right hand and a sheaf of straw in his left. "Very good. Ye'll have gone far in your time, no doubt. Have ye any examinations?"

"Well, Matriculation," said Laura cautiously. "And I worked for Higher Schools, and might have got it, except that I was superannuated for six weeks, owing to a—a misunderstanding with the headmistress."

"Och, aye." He regarded her with respect. "That will be the London Matriculation. My son is a scholar of Balliol College, Oxford. You would understand that John Balliol was a Scotsman, of course. No the best sort of Scotsman, no, indeed, but—well, well!"

"Of course." They regarded one another gravely. "I'm looking for a man called Loudoun," said Laura, as though continuing the subject.

"Och, aye." He considered awhile, then bent to his work. She waited for a quarter of an hour. Then he said, "Loudoun? From Ballachulish, no doubt."

"Well, thereabouts," said Laura. He shook his head.

"I would not be knowing him."

"Ah," said Laura. "He had some relation murdered, believe, just after the war."

"Do you tell me! That would be Loudoun of Craigullich. I mind well hearing of that. That's strange it was. Well, well! And indeed, one Stewart —Malcolm Stewart was the name—was hanged for murder in 1919. That should have been Non-Proven. But they hanged him. Doubtless they were right, but—I dinna ken. I have argued in this way and I have argued it that. Well, well! Ye would hardly recollect it. And his kinsman, Seamas a Glinnhe, to be hanged before him. Well, well! Although, mind you, it was said to be his own wife gi'ed the police the hint!"

He bent again to his work, and Laura, crossing a tennis court and a stretch of beautiful lawn, answered the summons of a bell to supper. But she turned back half-way.

"The name couldn't have been Menzies?" she inquired.

"Menzies? No, no. It was Stewart, and I minded me of Seamas a Glinnhe. He shot him—or so the wife whispered—and the name was the same. It is a strange thing that. Well, well!"

Supper among the professors at the seaside hostel was a combination of the sublime and the ridiculous; the sublime being rendered by the conversation, most of which was entirely above Laura's head, and the ridiculous by the machinations of the cook, who took a fit either of religion or temper immediately after the soup and refused to travel further into the promised land of fish, joint, and poultry.

This demonstration of the artistic temperament created consternation; not, to do the scientific mind complete justice, among the professors, many

of whom might as well have been eating cotton-wool for all they probably knew to the contrary, but among the servants of the hostel, who had a keen sense of hospitality, *noblesse oblige* and *amour propre.*

"What will we do?" enquired one of the maids of Laura, who, among so many fossils, gave some signs of belonging or appertaining to the human race.

"Easy," said Laura, rising. "Lead me to the kitchen, and you girls follow out my instructions to the letter. Boot, saddle, to horse and away!"

The Highland mind being capable of interpreting a mood, and of following a self-appointed leader, the girls, giggling, followed her out, and the professors, blissfully unaware, for the most part, that Mrs. Bradley's deputy had contrived to make the cook laugh and that the supper was, in consequence, saved, enjoyed (or suffered) the rest of their meal amid a babel of learned conversation. Even coffee was achieved, and at this point, Laura, who had regaled herself in the kitchen on cold viands infinitely superior, in her opinion, to the supper provided for the delegates, escaped to the fresh air once more.

"Did you suffer from Agnes McAllistair?" the gardener sympathetically enquired. "She has religion, that one."

"It doesn't seem to have improved her sense of Christian responsibility," Laura remarked. "What was that you were saying about Stewart being hanged for murder in 1919? Was his name really Stewart?"

"His name was Malcolm Stewart of Craigullich, Lochaber," said the gardener.

"I suppose that really *was* his name?" said Laura. "I mean, his name *couldn't* have been Menzies?"

"His name was Stewart. I'm telling ye Malcolm Stewart was his name, and he was hanged for the murder of the man Loudoun. He was shooting him and throwing the body into a small wee loch that lies just east of the house. It was Non-Proven, I would have said. He hated the man; that was known; and the brother afterwards married on the wife. But there was no doubt about the killing, so said the law, and they hanged him."

Laura went to bed thoughtful. There was one thing certain. Hector Loudoun's dream was not entirely the product of a nerve-ridden imagination. A man had been hanged, and the name of that man was Malcolm Stewart.

She had other things to think of. In the morning, at ten o'clock, there was Mrs. Bradley's paper to be read. The *contretemps* at supper had put her at ease about this. She no longer feared the professors. She despised them. Ultimately, she told herself, drawing Mrs. Bradley's typescript towards her and commencing to glance along its lines (most of which she knew by heart already), the hand that cooks the supper rules the world.

The morning dawned brilliantly. She got up early, walked through the beautiful grounds of the hostel and on to the road, and strolled as far as the castle before she turned to come back for breakfast. Porridge, eggs and bacon, fish (comprising haddock and kippers), bannocks, oatcake, scones, toast and rolls, the finest butter, honey, and pots of Dundee marmalade, put heart into the delegates and fortified them against the coming session. From ten until one they sat in conference, and learned question and answer took so long that Laura, to her annoyance, did not have a chance to read Mrs. Bradley's paper, although it was down on the programme for eleven-thirty. She was asked to begin the afternoon session with it at half-past two, and astonished the delegates by refusing, very abruptly and pugnaciously, to do anything of the kind.

"But it is down on the programme," said the chairman, mildly.

"It was down in the programme for this morning," said Laura firmly. She looked round upon the gathering. "These gentlemen are full of Scotch broth, salmon, hot roast beef, three vegetables, cabinet pudding, and fruit. They are in no condition to appreciate Mrs. Bradley's paper on the Re-orientation of Psycho-Pathological Cases of Paranoia."

"Well," said the chairman; but his forthcoming remarks were forestalled by a learned professor of Biology who had begun the morning with his own paper on birds. This gentleman, leaning back in his chair, laughed heartily and infectiously. "Very well," said the chairman lamely. "Perhaps in that case, Professor Anatole Ruski would give us his views on the Mendelian Theory of Heredity as applied to the folk of the Upper Ibaburi."

Laura began to see clearly why Mrs. Bradley had elected not to come to the conference. Tea, however, like lunch, was supremely satisfactory, and the country surrounding Inverness supremely satisfying. She went to bed at ten, rose very early, and, not being the person to return by the same route as that which she had followed on the outward journey if there were any possible alternative, took the train which left Inverness station for the south-

west, skirted Culloden Moor, dropped down across the River Findhorn as it wound among the mountains of Strath Dearn, ran beside the Spey to Kingussie, crossed the river five miles further on, and struck sharply southward to Dalwhinnie. Here, having changed her mind about going on to Dalnaspidal, she got out.

It was very much later in the day than she had expected, and she had nothing but a packet of chocolate in her pocket and her luggage in a rucksack on her shoulders. She set out to find somewhere to sleep and a reliable guide to put her, next morning, on the track which would take her by the easiest route to Loch Laggan and so to Glen Spean, by the Braes of Lochaber. She had no knowledge of the countryside, but found a room at the hotel and a Highland maid who advised her to take the secondary road northwards to Drumgask and pick up a bus or motor-coach out to Fort William.

MRS. BRADLEY, having placed part of her treasure trove in a watchglass, added glacial acetic acid and poked delicately at the result with a glass rod. She had already diagnosed the probable presence of blood on the bracken fronds by using the phenolphthalein test, but she was not certain of the age of the bloodstains, so, to her glacial acetic acid solution, she added two or three pinhead crystals of common salt. She then brought her mixture to boiling-point and transferred two or three drops to a microscopic slide and covered this with a glass slip. She then brought her solution to the boil again, and, when it cooled, the presence of blood was shown by the dark-brown crystals.

She put away her paraphernalia—it formed part of her hand-luggage wherever she went—and made a note in her tiny writing. She wondered how Laura was faring, but spared scarcely a thought for Ian and Catherine, whose adventures had been considerably more startling than those of her secretary and companion.

Laura set out for the station she was told she would find at Drumgask. There were eight miles of hill-road to traverse, on either side of which rose the mountains of Badenoch. The road, which forked from the main road almost opposite the hotel at which she had spent the night, was deserted. The place she had left consisted only of a few houses, two hotels, and a shop, and was on the very lonely road from Struan which comes by the Pass

of Drumochter, fifteen hundred feet up and running beside the Boar of Badenoch and the Sow of Atholl.

Laura's secondary road was not so grand. As she approached Glen Spey from the more desolate and wilder Glen Truim the scenery became quite pastoral. Valleys, and even fields, took the place of the bens and the passes, and, upon approaching the River Spey itself, she encountered early motorists, driving westwards from Kingussie, the centre from which she hoped her bus or motor-coach would run.

She was almost sorry, as she waited at the roadside to flag a passing vehicle, to give up her walk. It was infinitely preferable to stride along in the keen, fresh air to standing or sitting in a public conveyance breathing in stale tobacco smoke and unable to see more than a portion of the scenery.

She looked at her watch. The day was yet young; Mrs. Bradley was in no hurry for her return; it might be as well to defer the business of catching a bus. One would stop at the hotel on Loch Laggan, she had no doubt. She decided to walk this further half-dozen miles, and, the decision made, humped her pack and set off down the road.

The walking thereabouts was easy and pleasant. The road, with its long curves, kept always to level ground, and the hotel was by the side of the loch. Laura covered the distance in under an hour and a half, and was hot and thirsty by the time she reached the hotel.

Unhitching her pack, she carried it into the lounge, put it down and, seating herself, hoped against hope that a country whose one blot, so far as she was aware, was its somewhat extraordinary licensing laws, would permit her to have some beer.

Before she could test this hope, however, she became aware that she was being regarded, over the top of an open newspaper, by eyes she seemed to recognize. She looked steadily at the eyes, and the newspaper was gradually lowered until, achieving a full glance at the face to which the eyes belonged, she saw that she was sharing the lounge with her artist acquaintance of Glencoe.

"Hullo," said Laura, recognizing that the onus of greeting was on her. "Good morning."

"Good morning," he said; and came over. "You can give me some help, if you will."

"As long as it isn't art criticism," said Laura, grinning.

“Ah, that!” He grinned also. “I’ve been told you were pulling my leg. I’ve given up art. I was too easy to see through, apparently. I’ve taken up canvassing of another kind now.”

It was on the tip of Laura’s tongue to reply:

“Yes, I knew you were phoney. But what exactly are you up to?”

Then she reflected that, after all, there had been murder done upon Rannoch Moor not so far from the spot on which this bearded stranger had chosen to pursue his extraordinary vocation of painting clear cold water over the oil colours on an old picture, and held back her verdict and her question. He answered the question, however.

“To tell you a bit more,” he went on, “I am on an assignment. I’ve been engaged to watch the interests of a fellow called Stewart. He reckons to own some property in the neighbourhood of Duror of Appin—know the place?”

“Well, yes, I know the Duror Inn,” admitted Laura, her heart giving a sudden bound of excitement. The man chuckled.

“I know you do. Just testing you, that’s all. Don’t be offended. I have to know whom I can trust. I’ve seen you go into the house. Craigullich is the name. Well, from what I’ve gathered, it seems that this fellow Stewart is trying to turn out another fellow—some sort of half-brother of his—but the fellow won’t go. So I, having been a pal of Stewart’s, and having time on my hands, and not, I might tell you, a tremendous amount of the ready, took on the job of keeping an eye on him.

“Now comes the oddest part: that day you gave me your cigarettes in Glencoe—many thanks, by the way; real lifesavers—I was due to meet Stewart. I was on the lookout for him. Well, he’s never turned up! It's the funniest thing on earth. I don’t know what to do. I haven't a bean at the moment, except an advance on my fee, which he gave me before we parted, so I’ve got to hang on as best I can. I’ve bought a book on Touting for a Living, and a carpet bag”—he indicated a very cheap suitcase nearby —“and I’ve invested in a few combs and toothbrushes and things, and I’m peddling them about this damned hilly countryside trying to get news of the bloke.”

“Stewart?”

“Stewart. Can’t find out a damned thing. And it’s funny, too, because, you see, we were to go together to a solicitor—or whatever they're called up here—and witness some transfer of title-deeds or something. Don’t

understand legal business—never did—but Stewart was in such a fever to get the job over and settled that I can't understand his not coming."

"Which way was he to come?" asked Laura.

"I don't know. He was walking, you see."

"But where were you to meet him?"

"Where you saw me—that little corrie above the old road through Glencoe. He made me a drawing. Look."

He opened the suitcase and took out a small sheet of paper.

"But suppose it had been raining or foggy?" persisted Laura.

"I don't know. He said he hoped it would be fine. And, dash it, it *was* fine! I couldn't possibly have missed him."

"Did anyone else know this—that you were meeting him?"

"Nobody else at all. I had to keep it very secret. I'm only telling you now because I'm in such a stew about the fellow, and I thought you must know something as you'd been inside that house."

"What made *you* go to the house?"

"To tell you the truth, I didn't know what to do. I had to do something, so I went to the house to have a look, that was all. And imagine what I felt to *see* you*!* And with a witch!"

"Why didn't you come up and speak?"

"Forbidden to show myself where this half-brother chap could see me. It appeared to be essential that the fellow should not suspect I had anything to do with Stewart."

"What do you want with me?"

"I want you to give me the low-down on this half-brother. Come how it may, you know him, or you wouldn't be visiting the house."

"I only visit the house with my employer, who happens to be a doctor, and is treating Mr. Loudoun," said Laura, who began not to like either the request or this new witness. "I'm afraid I can't help you at all. Neither of us knows Mr. Loudoun except in the way I've said, and as for your Mr. Stewart . . ."

She thought no more about a drink, although a waiter had been hovering for some moments on the brink of their conversation. She slung her pack over her shoulder, bade an abrupt farewell to the pseudo-artist turned pedlar, and shot out past the waiter, who looked a little astonished and somewhat affronted as he withdrew to the lair from which he had emerged.

Laura, to her infinite chagrin, was in time to see the dust rising behind a departing bus. Rather than stay where she was, she tramped onward alongside Loch Laggan and picked up a bus an hour later.

Upon thinking over her small adventure she was inclined to believe that she had made, although inadvertently, a discovery of value. So far as she knew, the body found upon Rannoch Moor had not been identified. If it were Stewart, and Stewart turned out to be the Ure of Loudoun's story, (so her mind raced on), then the importance of the chance meetings, first with the mad artist, and now with the sane bagman, could scarcely be overestimated.

She was tired of her journey back to Ballachulish, and wanted nothing more than to see Mrs. Bradley again and acquaint her with this new development.

Chapter Seven

★

The heathery isle!
Fraoch Eilean!

War cry of the MacDonalds and of the MacNaughtons

★

When Catherine had been laid on her bunk in the single cabin boasted by the *Kerisaig,* the owner of the craft put about and ran out past the small island of Shuna and the village of Portnacroich, on the east side of Loch Linnhe, came by the narrow channel between Lismore and the small town of Appin, and then, intent upon the continuation of his honeymoon, which had suffered, he felt, some interruption on the previous afternoon and night, he rounded into the Sound of Mull, crossed over towards the long cape of Ardnamurchan, and then let the *Kerisaig* run freely northwards towards the Sound of Sleat and the island of Skye.

They took the channel by the Kyle of Lochalsh and cruised up between Scalpay and the Narrows to run for Portree. They spent the nights on board the cruiser in the harbour, and put in a day or two cruising. Then, from Portree, they followed the usual steamer route round the north of the island to Dunvegan and Kilmuir.

Catherine wanted to see Dunvegan Castle. Rest and massage had greatly improved the condition of the wrenched foot, and she had been spending most of each day in the cockpit. Ian helped her ashore, and she found that she could walk without much difficulty. He would not allow her to do much walking, however, and they soon returned to the cruiser, having ample stores aboard, and decided to run for Loch Harport before it was dark. A gale blew up from south-westwards as they made Dunvegan Head,

so Ian put back, and they spent the night at Kilmuir, tight and snug and not particularly regretful, as, in spite of the gale, the weather remained fine.

In the morning, however, a sea-mist clouded the sun, and they were obliged to lie hove-to until it cleared. This was not until nearly ten o'clock, but then a bright sun broke through, and, chugging out of Loch Dunvegan, they rounded the headland, giving it plenty of room as the seas were high and the wind was blowing very strongly still from south-west, and came round Duirinish and into Loch Harport to Drynoch. They left the cruiser there and walked across to Sligachan, a distance of less than ten miles as the crow flies, and followed the low ground formed by a small river valley. They came down past the hotel and the low-roofed kirk to the head of a long narrow sea-loch, but did not go down to the water's edge, for the tide was out and the rocks were dark with wet seaweed. Behind them rose the peaks of Sgurr nan Gillean between which in winter, the snow lies drifted and heavy.

They spent the night at the hotel, and next day took the road towards Bradford and Kyleakin. They had left Sconser, a little place near the seaward end of the loch, and were admiring the mountain heights of the eastern Cuillin, when the adventure began which brought them back, as fast as the *Kerisaig* could thresh through the narrow seas, to Ballachulish. They met Loudoun; the only Loudoun that they, so far, had seen; the ghost-ridden Loudoun of the moor.

He was walking with two other men, and was on crutches. Immediately he saw them he pursed his lips and lowered his eyes and slightly but unmistakably shook his head. They passed him, therefore, without the slightest sign of recognition. When they looked back he was seated on the ground. The men were still one on either side of him.

"Funny," said Catherine, when they were out of earshot. "I wonder why he didn't want us to speak?"

"I should say we were right the first time we met him, and he really *is* mad," said Ian. "Still, we can't do anything about it. I wonder why the crutches? He must have had another fall, I suppose, and busted himself again."

They walked on, and soon forgot him. They were unaware that there was still a Hector Loudoun at Craigullich.

It was too far for Catherine to walk to Broadford, so, some way along the shore of the reed-girt sea-loch whose margin they were following, they

turned back. When they came to the place where Loudoun and his companions had seated themselves, there were the indentations of his crutches on the soft ground, and then, as though he had formed the letters idly as he sat there, the word *circauig.* Before they reached Sconser he was in sight again. He made no more sign of recognition than he had done the first time, but, as they passed, they could hear that he was singing. The tune was that of Loch Lomond, but the time was peculiarly stressed.

"Dadadad dah dah dah dadadad," sang Loudoun. "Dadadad dah dah dah dadadad. Dadadad dah dah dah dadadad. Dadadad dah dah dah dadadad. Dadadad dah dah dah dadadad," he continued; and so, in a marked Morse rhythm of S.O.S., to the end of the tune.

Ian was frowning. He hurried Catherine past the crippled man and his two companions, and said nothing until they were back at their hotel. Then he said:

"You have lunch. I'm going out on my own for a bit. I want to stretch my legs."

Stretching his legs took him back by the way they had come. The legend *circauig* was plain to see. He obliterated it, and then turned back once more. He had seen nothing of the three this time, and so deduced that they had not walked as far as Sligachan but must have turned off before they got into the little port.

He was undecided what to do next, and badly wanted his lunch, so he joined Catherine, who had made her meal last as long as ever she could, and reported what he had done.

"If only we could be certain that he isn't just a lunatic," he said, "we'd know what to do, I suppose."

"What would that be?" she enquired.

"Why, get to Uig as soon as possible and find out what's going on. As a matter of fact, I think I shall do that anyway. We might just as well go there as anywhere else, and, if we can't locate him, that will have to be the end of it, but if we do locate him, and there's any funny business going on, we'll have to do what we can for him, I suppose."

"Must we interfere?" asked Catherine. "If he wanted our help, he had only to speak as we passed."

"I know, but, don't you see, that's just the point. He didn't want us to show that we recognized him, and yet I'm certain he was asking for help in that song. And then . . ."

"But why Uig?"

"I'm just coming to that. He wrote *circauig* on the mud. Divide it up and you get *circa* (near or round about) Uig, a place on the north-west side of the island. I take it he was telling us where to find him. He's in trouble. Those two blokes looked tough. Maybe he dared not speak."

"It sounds like a gangster film," protested Catherine.

"Well, yes, it does, and we're on holiday, and it might be all moonshine, you think. Still, you know, Kate, without worrying ourselves at all we can cruise to Uig, and there we shall be no worse off, so what do you say?"

"I say let's start this afternoon. We did so little hiking this morning that I can easily walk back as far as the boat when you've had your lunch; we are going back directly after tea in any case."

"Good enough. But we'll hire a car. I'd like to get to Uig as soon as we can. It isn't every day we get a thriller handed us. Let's make the most of it. I can see your point, of course, when you say there can't really be anything in it, but, after all, you know, old Morag did disappear that morning we left Craigullich, or, possibly, the night before when we heard those doors being shut. There's no doubt Loudoun was scared to death of his 'ghost,' and there's also no doubt there was somebody in the house that night besides the four that we know of."

So they still left *Kerisaig* at her moorings, and went by car to Uig. It was a little place standing on a bay of the same name, an inlet of broad Loch Snizort. Application to the driver of the car brought lodgings at the house of one Donald MacDonald, who had his house on the hillside facing the sea. It was a fair-sized modern house—large, in fact, compared with the two-roomed crofts which, scattered over the seaward face of the hill, comprised the rest of the village. Two streams cut gorges in the hillside and then flowed into the bay, and the countryside was treeless. The six-roomed house had no garden. Shaggy, long-horned Highland cattle grazed to the very door. The nearest neighbour, an old lady named Ishbel MacMillan, lived in a one-room croft boasting neither chimney nor window, and with the hearth in the middle of the floor.

Having accepted them with reserve, courtesy and great hospitality as lodgers, the family made no enquiry as to the probable length of their stay, and Ian, by the end of supper, felt as though he had lived in the house half his life-time and could as easily live the second half there. It was like home.

The MacDonalds were crofters, like their neighbours, owning rather more land than some. They had a son and a married daughter in Canada, and another son training for the ministry. The younger daughter was at Edinburgh University, where term had not yet ended. They were able to let her room during the early part of the summer, and the son's room until the middle of September, since the boy took a post as holiday tutor in England until the schools went back. It was early in the season for tourists, so that both rooms had happened to be vacant. They took the larger one, and looked out beyond a wonderful seascape to where the small group of islands that lay in the entrance to Loch Snizort seemed to point the way to the Little Minch and the Outer Hebrides.

"Wish we were staying here," said Ian. "For the whole of our honeymoon, I mean; but I am wondering how we can begin this business of trying to find out Loudoun, to know what he wants us to do."

Catherine could make no suggestion, so the first thing they did upon the following morning was to explore the surrounding country. It seemed to them that a cripple on crutches and attended by two henchmen (or guards, as they now chose to believe them to be) must be sufficiently noticeable to provoke comment. Ian, therefore, at the end of a morning of strolling, loitering, and lazing, during which he had contrived to see everybody, he thought, who lived on or near the hillside, went into the post-office to enquire about a telegram.

The post-office was also the general shop, the chemist's shop, the draper's, the ironmonger's, and the confectioner's. Ian, going in to ask for his fictitious telegram, and ducking his head to avoid hitting it on the tin baths pendant from the ceiling, had a long and interesting conversation with the post-mistress, first on the subject of the telegram, and secondly on his anxiety for his crippled friend, who had promised to show up at Uig during the week, but of whom, so far, he had no news.

The post-mistress had no news, either, of anyone even remotely resembling the description Ian gave to her of Loudoun. A cripple, poor thing, she was understood to say, would have little pleasure on the hillside at all, at all.

"We're wasting our time," he said, on returning to Catherine. "Let's go fishing. The MacIvers have a boat, and I'm anxious to try out those trident-looking hooks they use here. I've never seen them before."

Arrangements were accordingly made, but before they could be put into practice all plans were changed, for, just as they were on their way down the hill to board the small boat they had hired, they caught sight of Loudoun again, and he winked and slightly nodded before turning off between his two companions towards the south.

Ian telescoped his rod, and told the younger MacIver, a lad of seventeen, that he would not fish after all, but would row on the bay.

"You will not be needing me?" asked the boy. Ian shook his head but added that that would make no difference to the terms on which the boat was hired.

"But it will. The fish was to go to them," said Catherine.

"Right. Come with us and row. We can fish later," said Ian. He gave his rod to the boy. "I may have to leave the boat. If I do, you'll look after my wife and catch all the fish in the sea, Malcolm?"

"I will that," said the young MacIver. "Which way for you?"

"Towards Snizort."

"Very good." There were two pair of oars, and Ian and MacIver sent the boat bucketing along whilst Catherine kept watch on their quarry. Whether Loudoun realized what the game was, or whether he had such difficulty with his crutches that he could not travel faster, Catherine was able to keep him in sight for nearly half a mile. Then she reported that he and his party must be heading inland. She had lost sight of them. Young MacIver, stimulated by Ian's commands, put in to the shore and the party landed.

Whether Loudoun had done it on purpose, or whether his crutches had slipped as his companions urged him up the cliff path, they did not know, but the boat party, by running rapidly in the direction which Catherine indicated, were in time to see him rolling over and over down the slope.

Ian was up with him first, but young MacIver was not far behind. As Ian bent to help him to his feet, and Catherine collected the crutches which were some little distance from each other, Loudoun said hoarsely but distinctly:

"The house on the skyline. You'll find it from the bay. The last house you see on the skyline."

He had no time to say more before his two companions, who had come down the slope as fast as they could, were beside him and taking him from Ian.

“Many thanks, sir,” said the more villainous-looking of the pair. “Our unfortunate friend lost his footing, and, at the same time, his crutches.”

The second man, who had accepted the crutches from Catherine, now came up with them and offered them to Loudoun.

“Can’t he manage without them?” asked Ian.

“No, no! I can’t manage without them,” interpolated Loudoun himself. “I am quite helpless without them.” With the aid of his two companions he took to the crutches again, and, with a brief word of thanks to the others, he made his way slowly up the hill.

Ian led the way to the boat, and MacIver pushed off.

“Will you be fishing now?” MacIver enquired.

“Aye,” said Ian. “Right in the middle of the bay. Look here, Malcolm, you can keep a secret, I know. That fellow with the crutches is a bit of a mystery. He says he’s staying at the house on the skyline. Now I want to get out to sea a bit, to identify that house; then perhaps you’ll be able to tell me who lives there, and what kind of people they are. Mind you, there’s probably nothing whatever in all this, but I happen to know that the fellow has been seriously ill, and, the last I heard, was missing from his home. He lives near Duror, south of Ballachulish, and nobody knew where he had gone.”

“The house on top of the hill is belonging to old Mrs. MacShuffie,” volunteered Malcolm, “but she is dead since Christmas Day. The house is empty, that it is.”

“That’s queer. Look here, I’m not doubting what you say, but I’d like to be sure of the house. Bend to it, and let’s have a look. The very last house to be seen on the skyline, he said.”

“While you are seeing it, you’ll not catch fish,” said Malcolm. “Aye, that will be Mrs. MacShuffie’s house,” he added, as, a little later, with the boat bouncing gently on the bay, they identified the house without question. “And now, if you are wishing to catch fish . . .”

They rowed further along until the house was no longer to be seen, and, using the double hook which so much intrigued Ian, caught forty fish including both whiting and haddock. Malcolm, who was to keep the catch, was pleased.

“He is a lucky man, that man who was rolling down the hill, whatever,” he said, with his slow sad smile. Both Ian and Catherine thought

this doubtful. They returned to Mrs. MacDonald's, but had no opportunity of discussing Loudoun's affairs until it was time to go to bed.

"The thing is," said Ian, "to get speech of the fellow, and see what he thinks he's up to. He may have some sort of persecution mania. It doesn't make sense for a grown man to be afraid to speak to people he's acquainted with. And why the crutches, I still wonder? Obviously he expects us to go to the house, and, obviously, since he insists on all this secrecy, at present we've got to respect his ideas and wishes. Old Morag's complete disappearance was certainly odd, and his own running away from Craigullich doesn't look too sensible, when, so far as we know, he was just going to begin treatment for his troubles. I've a good mind to go up there to-night. I wonder whether I can leave this house and get back here again without the MacDonalds' knowing?"

"Easily," said Catherine, "but, all the same, I should tell them. They're probably used to visitors who want to do idiotic things. Tell them you're off to see the Quiraing by moonlight. That's quite a decent excuse for leaving the house, and, with it, you can get back when you like. It isn't like having to knock people up to get in. The door is unlocked night and day."

Ian kissed her, put on his trousers and jacket again, and went down into the kitchen. As Catherine had anticipated, the reason he gave for going out at night was received without question or incredulity by the MacDonalds, although Mrs. MacDonald warned him against getting too hot by walking too fast, in case he should take a chill from the night air, and old Grandfather MacDonald, who had his own sitting-room, in which the family dined, and kept it as his fathers before him had done because he detested modern contrivances in general, and Glasgow furniture in particular, warned him that the Quiraing was haunted, and also that the road to it, even by moonlight, would probably be shrouded in mist.

Ian set off, carrying a heavy stick which he had borrowed from the old man. It was ostensibly to help him on his long tramp northwards, but in actual fact he took it because he did not care for the look of Loudoun's guardians and wanted to be on the winning side if there was going to be trouble.

It was barely dark when he set out. He travelled north for a little, in case anyone was interested in his movements, and then came round again from the most outlying houses of Uig in search of the house he had in mind. It was easy enough to find it. It was the usual two-roomed croft, and there

were no lights showing. This did not surprise him; what did surprise him was that three men, all strangers in the place, could inhabit a house whose owner had recently died, and the fact not be known to the post-mistress.

He came up to the door and listened. Nothing was to be heard. Determined not to return without having found out something more about Loudoun, Ian knocked at the door. Nobody answered, and so he knocked again, louder. Again no one came, so he beat upon the door with the heavy knob of old MacDonald's stick, and then opened the door and went in.

The interior of the croft was as black as any windowless room could be. Ian listened, but no one was asleep there. He struck a match after closing the door behind him, and found on the plain, heavy table a half-used candle. He lighted it, saw bread and a parcel (which proved, on investigation, to be cheese), and two bottles, one full, the other almost empty, of whisky. Three beds, or what passed for beds—they were inflated rubber mattresses laid on the floor and covered with travelling rugs—were in the other room of the croft. These beds formed a discovery well worth making, for it was unlikely that the ordinary inhabitants of the village would possess no other beds but rubber mattresses. On the other hand, these were just the things which could be transported very easily by car or even as hand-luggage, while the rugs would have caused no surprise to a casual observer if they had chanced to be seen in transport.

The mystery still lay in the fact that nobody—for Ian took it for granted that if the post-mistress did not know of the existence of the strangers, nobody knew of it—had seen the three men settle in.

He concluded that the men returned to the croft after nightfall, so ordering matters that, even so, they were not observed. This would present, he thought, no particular difficulty. The situation of the croft—there were no other houses within about seven hundred yards—would make it a comparatively simple matter to come to the place after dark without being seen, and, if necessary, to leave before morning, again without being detected.

Although he had seen no car, he deduced that the men must own one, for it was clear they did not buy food or other necessities at the village shop, yet there was evidence that food was brought into the house, for he had seen the loaf of bread, the piece of cheese, and the bottles of whisky on the shelf in the adjoining room. A car would also account for the fact that the postmistress had not seen a cripple.

He went back to the room with his candle. On the floor was the primitive peat-bucket which was still in use on the island. Its embers, however, were long since dead, he decided. The men and Loudoun were fortunate that it was summer, for, although the nights were chilly, they were not rigorous. The accepted—in fact, the only—method of warming a croft with neither window nor chimney was to get the peat glowing out in the open air and then to bring the bucket into the house. To kindle peat in the house was to end up as smoked as a haddock. If the men had wanted to keep their presence secret, as there seemed no doubt at all that they did, to kindle peat in the open was to advertise their tenancy of the croft. It seemed clear that they kindled no fire. Probably old Mrs. MacShuffie, the deceased crofter, had been the last person to kindle peat in that particular tin.

He began to be interested and excited. There was something more to know about Loudoun, and he was determined to know it. He pinched out the candle, went to the door and held it open, so that, if the candle had left any smell, the keen wind blowing inland from the sea could dissipate it before the men returned, and then he shut the door behind him and crouched inside the stone wall by which the small house was surrounded on the south-west, which faced the sea, and to left and right of it.

He hoped that the men would not keep him there too long. The wall sheltered him from the wind, but it was very uncomfortable to crouch out of sight behind it. The moon began to come up, and the darkness had deepened, so that anything silhouetted would have attracted instant notice, and he did not want, at that juncture, to advertise his presence either to Loudoun or his guards.

He had been in position for about a quarter of an hour, and was not, owing to his Highland blood, grown too impatient at the waiting, nor too uncomfortable to philosophize, when he heard the sound of a car.

It drove on, well past the house. This he had expected, and he reflected, too, that it might not be the right car. But patience and philosophy were rewarded when he heard the sounds of footsteps approaching the croft.

Where he was, the mist was not dense, but below the cliffs of the bay the sea was as white as the mist, and the moonshine could only pick out a swirl of phosphorescence here and there. Wreaths of the mist came swirling to the wall behind which he was crouched, and then retreated as though in a dance. Unheard, mysterious forces appeared to be directing its eddying sway. The sky above was clear, and the gentle moon, benign in her suffused

and radiant light, swam in an aura of her own which was hallowed by the measureless space of the night.

This peace was rudely shattered. Ian, having conceived a plan of action, put it into immediate effect by rising from where he was hidden, and, just as his quarry approached, by staggering into the moonlight and singing (but not too loudly, since he did not intend, if he could help it, to attract the attention of anyone but Loudoun and his guards) a bawdy French song whose words were not only unprintable but, in the exact sense, untranslatable. He then broke into a monologue in broad Scots, insisting upon shaking hands with himself, and, when the three approached, with them also. He then offered to dance a Highland fling for them, or, if they preferred it, a reel.

He was interested to notice that Loudoun was no longer on crutches. He made no sign that he recognized Ian, but remarked to the others that it was some drunken lout of a tourist who had been taking too much whisky. One of the men gave Ian a push. Ian retaliated by giving him a tap on the head with Grandfather MacDonald's stick, and by inviting the other man to hit him and see what he would get.

Then he went off, singing, and heard, above the syncopations of his own hiccupping voice, the sound of a door being closed. The plan, so far, had not miscarried. Loudoun knew that he was at hand. The next move was up to him, if he wanted help. Ian, having worked out what his own next move would have to be, returned quietly to the croft and crouched again in the heavy shadow of the wall. Sure enough, in about a quarter of an hour, out came Loudoun, alone. Ian could see him clearly in the moonlight.

There was but one purpose for which he would have been allowed out without his guards (if that was indeed what they were) and he carried out this purpose at a little distance from the wall, and at the same time began to sing softly his S.O.S. to the tune, this time, of "Annie Laurie."

"Here!" said Ian softly. Loudoun gave up his Morse signals and sang, instead, the words, to the tune of "Loch Lomond": "Which way did you come, and which way shall I come? Can I be in England before ye?"

"Bunk for the car," muttered Ian.

Loudoun, who, in spite of his nerves, seemed a ready enough fellow-conspirator, made a leap for the wall and fell over it. Ian followed. From the doorway there were the sounds of confusion which indicated that Loudoun's guards were already alert to the possibility that their charge

might be attempting to escape. Ian, confident of being able to outdistance them, ran away from the direction of the car, and crouched low at first, to deceive them as to his height, for he was considerably taller than their captive. As they were not expecting to chase two men, but only Loudoun himself, they fell into the trap, and came lumbering and galloping after him. They were big, heavy fellows, good enough at guarding a prisoner already in their hands, thought Ian, grimly, but not the men to catch him when once he had slipped through their fingers.

Ian led them a dance until he heard the sound of the car starting up. The men heard it, too, and, realizing that they had been fooled, they turned and blundered off in the direction from which the sounds came. Ian went to ground, thankful to be free of the unpleasant suspicion that he was likely to get a bullet between his shoulders. He then scrambled down the cliff, and made at once for MacDonald's house. He had given Loudoun his chance to get away, and, for some half hour after he had returned to the house, and, upstairs in his stockinged feet, was whispering the story to Catherine, he experienced the glow of achievement *and* self-congratulation which he felt to be his due. It was she who asked, when at last he got off the edge of the bed where he had been sitting and put on his pyjamas and slid beside her under the blankets, what he was going to do next.

"Oh, Lord!" he said. "I don't know."

"For one thing, they may know you again," she pointed out with a shudder. "It won't take them long to put two and two together, and decide that the drunken man, and the man who drew them off while Mr. Loudoun escaped, are one and the same person."

"They may not know I drew them away on purpose," Ian suggested.

"I don't want to risk it," said she. "I'll be glad to get back to Snizort, and into the boat."

"Will you?" His arms tightened suddenly. "All right, Kate. I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll make for Snizort first thing to-morrow morning, and we'll get back to Ballachulish as soon as we can, and tell all the tale to Laura's boss."

Chapter Eight

★

Life or Death!
Beatha no bas!
alternately with:
Another for Hector!
Fear eil' airson Eachainn!

War cry of the Macleans of Duart

★

The police had done all that they could to discover the identity of the murdered man whom Laura, after her talk with the amateur bagman, had decided must be Stewart, or, as the first Loudoun had called him in his typescript, Ure.

It seemed, from the published evidence of which the Scottish papers were, in a dignified fashion, full, that the newest police theory was that the dead man might have been on a walking tour from Tyndrum to Kinlochleven when he was set upon and murdered on Rannoch Moor.

Laura's news of the bagman-artist had aroused Mrs. Bradley's particular interest. She could not see, from the map of the route which the dead man was believed to have taken, that he had needed to stray on to Rannoch Moor at all. He would have been bound to arrive at Kingshouse, and could there have enquired the way. Had he really come from Tyndrum through Bridge of Orchy—a straightforward route—to Kingshouse, he then had only to choose the road through Glencoe towards Ballachulish and so along the southern shore of Loch Leven to Kinlochleven, or, if he wanted rougher walking and a more adventurous, if somewhat shorter trip, the *larig* called the Devil's Staircase which led directly from the Glencoe Road up to the town which he had for his objective. In either case, he could not have

avoided Kingshouse, where was the inn and any information a traveller, belated or otherwise, might require.

She thought a great deal about this particular aspect of the matter, and at last decided that, as her business in Inverness had been concluded by Laura, and as she had no pressing engagements for a week or two, it would be interesting to try to find out exactly what the murdered man had done. The police, before accepting this theory of his route, must have been provided with some facts which had led them to form it, but to what extent Mrs. Bradley could not determine. However, it would do no harm, she felt, to go over the ground again.

This she proceeded to do in the most literal fashion, taking Laura with her. Jonathan, Deborah, and the lad Brian had left Ballachulish for Blairgowrie, where they proposed to stay for the Scottish Games held there in July, and there had been no word of the movements of the *Kerisaig* and her crew for several days, so she and Laura were free to do as they pleased.

Laura, full of her encounter with Stewart's mysterious friend, and convinced that Stewart and Ure were one and the same, was greatly in favour of the scheme, and picturesquely professed herself ready to walk, ride, drive or fly over hill and dale, mountain and pass, bealach, blair, brinach, clachan, craig, coille, clunie, corrie, druim, eilean, fail, haugh, kyle, larig, linn, machair, mull, rath, rhinns, sgeir, shieling, strath, struan, tullach, or uam, as her leader dictated.

Mrs. Bradley, respectful to and apprehensive of this vocabulary, confessed that she shared Laura's enthusiasm, and agreed to make an early start the next day. They decided to do exactly as the newspapers stated that the murdered man had done once he had reached Tyndrum. To carry out their plan it was necessary to get to Tyndrum, so they drove southward to Portnacroish and followed the main road round Loch Creran past Benderloch Station and across Connel Ferry. Then, instead of going on to Oban, they would turn eastwards along Loch Etive, follow the same road which went through the Pass of Brender along the narrow northern arm of Loch Awe, and on through Dalmally to Tyndrum.

It would have been preferable, had they been walking and had they not been following a trail laid down, as it were, for their guidance, to have branched off northwards about two miles east of Dalmally and taken the narrow road up Glen Orchy which joined the main motor road from

Tyndrum near Bridge of Orchy Station before the two routes led on to Loch Tulla and so to Kingshouse, but this slight pleasure was denied them.

It was not difficult, once they reached Bridge of Orchy, to see some point in the police theory that the murdered man could very easily have come on to Rannoch Moor. At Bridge of Orchy it was possible to do two things, either of which would have led to the Kingshouse Inn. The main road, which, according to the police theory, the man had followed, kept east of Loch Tulla and followed the shore of the loch. It crossed the small railway almost at the northern end of the loch, proceeded in snake-like bends until it came to the broken Loch Baa south of Loch Laidon, passed this loch and then wound away in a westerly bend to Glencoe, by-passing Kingshouse Inn, which was on the old road, not the new. It crossed the old road, however, just south of Kingshouse, and it was at this crossing, according to the police, as reported in the daily papers, that the man had mistaken his way and had wandered on to the moor, across the end of which the new road ran before it swung westward towards the cliffs and battlements of Glencoe.

The police theory, therefore, was tenable up to a point. On the other hand, it was not very easy to see why a man who had followed a highroad throughout his trip should suddenly, and for no good reason, forsake it at all, let alone mistake for it a secondary road which was narrower and very much out of repair.

Mrs. Bradley and Laura went back to Bridge of Orchy and tried the old road from there. After half a mile they came back. No one could have made such a mistake. Mrs. Bradley returned to her original opinion. If the man had strayed on to Rannoch Moor it must have been his intention so to stray. It was not the result of a mistake, and there was no reason to suppose, either, that he had missed his way in the dark. It was quite conceivable that he might have lost the road if a sudden mist had come, of the kind that could sweep over the land like a cloud, but the weather, so far, had been perfect.

"Of course, the pedlar-artist could have murdered him, couldn't he?" said Laura.

It was known that he had stayed one night in Tyndrum and the next in the hotel at the head of the loch. He had had to leave the motor road at Bridge of Orchy in order to get to this hotel, and, when he left the next morning (which, it seemed, he had done at nine o'clock or shortly after), he

was faced with a stretch of about twelve miles by the main road, plus the extra three or four to get back on to it from the inn if he stuck to the road (and he was not provided with climbing boots, according to the description of the body supplied by Laura).

Sixteen miles, even of hilly walking—and the gradients on the new road were not very formidable—should not have taken a man in middle life from nine o'clock until after dark to accomplish. There was no published evidence, so far, of the time at which the murder was supposed to have taken place, so nothing could be checked from that. In any case, the onset and the passing of *rigor mortis* varied so greatly according to individual idiosyncrasy and to conditions of temperature and other natural phenomena that the actual time of death was always difficult to assess.

"Let's assume," suggested Laura, "that the police are right, and he did lose his way, and see whether that gets us anywhere. Then we can begin again, and assume that he went on to Rannoch Moor on purpose, and see if *that* leads anywhere."

As they had already covered more than a hundred miles since leaving Ballachulish, Mrs. Bradley suggested that these new manœuvres might be more successful in the morning, so Laura drove on to Kingshouse, where she was welcomed, and they spent the night there, and, by doing so, missed the return of Ian and Catherine from Skye. Laura was glad of her dinner and a bed. They had had a picnic lunch, and she had done all the driving and was more tired than she had suspected when at last they garaged the car.

The next day the weather, which, so far, had given the lie to all critics of its antics in the Western Highlands, broke in solid, teeming, apparently limitless rain which made bounding cataracts down the mountain-sides and torrents of the hitherto placid streams.

Laura, awakened early by the sound of it on her window, got out of bed and looked on to a grey-shrouded world. It was impossible to see very far. The mountains were hidden in a curtain of rain and mist, or loomed in nebulous bulk of a dark no-colour, shapeless, veiled, and depressing. A strange light illumined the landscape, and things seen near at hand—the many-coloured heather of the moors, the patches of bright-green grass or brilliant bog—were so rich and lovely in the rain that it was certain that the countryside had come into its own, and was intended to be seen, as Laura pointed out later, on wet days only.

She dressed, put on her waterproof coat and went out for a walk. She splashed and dripped and streamed, grew red in the face and wet about the feet, and returned in about an hour, exuberantly cheerful and even hungrier than usual.

There were plenty of facilities for dealing with wet clothing at the inn. She gave her things to a maid, went off to have a bath, and appeared at breakfast in Mrs. Bradley's coat and a pair of travelling slippers.

They spent the morning indoors exchanging theories about the case, and by lunch Laura's things, except for her shoes, were dry. What was more, the rain ceased at midday, and the maid lent Laura a pair of gentlemen's brogues whilst her shoes were drying. They were on the large side, but Laura had big feet and could manage to keep them on, although she could not have gone for a walk in them. At just after two she and Mrs. Bradley got out the car, and drove over roads which in parts resembled rivers, in an attempt to discover what had taken the murdered man on to Rannoch Moor.

"An odd thing about it," said Laura, "is that the Hector Loudoun whom Ian and Catherine met, mentioned Mr. Ure in that typescript. If Mr. Ure is Stewart, and the Loudoun *we* saw murdered him while the other Loudoun took his half-brother's place, he'd have wanted to keep Ure dark, you'd rather think. He's up to some pretty game, it seems to me. If only we knew what it was."

Mrs. Bradley agreed. She did not see, at the moment, how they were to receive much enlightenment unless the haunted Hector Loudoun should choose, or be compelled, to reappear and tell more than he had, so far, disclosed. It was possible, of course, that he had no more to tell, but the fact of his disappearance from Craigullich, she supposed, and possibly (although this was more open to doubt) of the disappearance of old Morag, made him strangely suspect.

She pondered, too, the strange story of the previous murder, and wondered to what extent the tale told by Janet Forbes to Laura was correct. The story intrigued her, if only because of its endless contradictions and silences. Granted that the details of it were true, it was one of the very strangest stories which had ever come to her ears. She wished she had the means of filling in all its obvious and tantalizing gaps. That a man should shoot his wife's lover was natural enough; but that he should shoot the brother instead, get himself hanged without a word of explanation or

defence, and so leave his wife free to marry the very person against whom, it would seem, his keenest hatred should have been directed, was fascinating, curious, and, for lack of further evidence, inexplicable.

"There is nothing to be found out here," she said to Laura, as they again came on to the moor and the car began to bounce. "If the murderer and the murdered man met, it would have been on the twelve-mile stretch after leaving Bridge of Orchy. Craigullich must now be our goal."

"We may hear the ghost," said Laura. The sky had begun to threaten. The fastnesses of the gloomy and sodden moor were not inviting. She was glad to drive back to the inn. They paid their bill, she took her own shoes, and shortly they were back in Ballachulish after a drive through Glencoe with its terrifying backcloth of sombre and scudding cloud, the tops of the mountains sunk in impenetrable mist, and the whole scene reminiscent of the strange and dreadful mezozoic age, its primordial terrors and grandeurs, its giant-statured vertebrates and all the crude, frightful chaos of pre-history.

"Well, this is a knock-out, of a sort," said Ian, faced at Ballachulish with the news that Mrs. Bradley, accompanied by Miss Menzies, had left for a short motor tour of the Western Highlands. "What do we do now?"

"I should think we'd better go at once to Craigullich and find out whether Mr. Loudoun has arrived there safely," said Catherine. Ian looked doubtful.

"For one thing, it's raining cats and dogs at present, and the cockpit's half-full of water; and for another, what if he hasn't?" he said. "We can't spend the whole of our time in getting him out of a mess. My instinct is to leave well alone, and to stay here, out of the wet."

"But aren't you curious to know what he was doing as the prisoner of those men, and why he needed our help?"

"Not particularly. But if you are, well, let's go. We can't do any harm by going, unless you catch your death of cold. The rain won't hurt *me.* It's in my bones. I only hope we haven't let a murderer loose on the countryside, that's all."

"A murderer?" said Catherine, looking extremely startled. "You mean he might have killed that man on the moor?"

"Good Lord, no! But he may have killed old Morag."

"Oh, heavens! You don't really think that! You know you don't! Besides, I don't see when he could have done it."

"Why do you think he had us there that night?"

"To keep him company. He said so."

"There was a lot more in it than that, I'm quite convinced. I ought not to have helped him escape. I see that now. I should just have told the police. It would have been much better."

"Oh, dear! That doesn't make it a very nice job to go and see him, then."

"Very well. Don't let's go."

"But I don't want to go back to Skye."

"Neither do I. We should wonder all the time what those other fellows were up to. It wouldn't be very enjoyable. I tell you what, Kate. You stay here at the hotel and wait for Aunt Adela and Laura, and I'll go over to Craigullich—I can run the boat down as far as Portnacroish and walk up the road from there—and have a word with Loudoun, if he's at home, and be back in time for dinner, or perhaps even lunch, if I start in good time in the morning."

"If you go, I'm coming with you."

"All right. That's just as you like." He could not account for his own misgivings in the matter and had hesitated to confide them to her, but early next morning, after a seven o'clock breakfast, they refuelled the *Kerisaig,* lying off North Ballachulish, and gently chugged southward down Loch Linnhe past the flattish headland west of the Duror Inn, and, keeping towards the eastern shore of the loch, came down past small islands to the little bay south of Portnacroish, and there anchored the cruiser and went ashore just north of Appin.

It was easy enough to get on to the road to Ballachulish, and it took them about a half hour to enter the policies of Craigullich. The most strange and sinister silence encompassed the house. The little loch, under skies neither grey nor blue, looked lonely, secret and deep. They went up to the house and knocked, but no one came. The door was unlocked. They went in.

"I don't like it," said Ian. He was more sensitive than his sister Laura, and more easily affected by atmosphere. The fact that the house seemed to be empty would, in itself and at that time of day, have affected nobody but a child or a neurasthenic. But the empty house was filled with something intangible and yet horrible which struck into his sensitivities as extreme cold might have struck into his bones. His Highland origins proclaimed themselves in a sixth sense as urgent and uncomfortable as the gift of

prophecy. “There’s something wrong,” he said. “You stay outside. I’m going to have a look round.”

“I’m coming too,” said Catherine. She followed him into the dining-room, the room in which they had sat with Loudoun upon their previous visit.

The dining-room was empty, and the portrait was gone from over the mantelpiece. In its place, attached to the wall by means of a piece of putty, was a fast-fading sprig of leaves from the bough of an ash tree. Under it had been scrawled across the wall in thick black pencil (of the kind that artists sometimes use for sketching) the motto from the armorial bearings of Menzies of Menzies, *Will God I Shall.*

Ian stood contemplating the hunting badge of his clan, and the confident assertion below it, without a word. Catherine watched him and the door. He turned on his heel and led the way into the opposite apartment, which was furnished as a drawing-room. Here lay the cause of that uneasiness which he had felt since his approach to the house. A dead man lay on the carpet, his blood congealing from a horrible wound in the neck.

“Get back!” said Ian to Catherine, barring the doorway with his body and filling it with his shoulders so that she should not see what he had seen. “Go into the dining room and stay there. There’s trouble—bad trouble—here.”

“Who is it?” she asked, speaking steadily.

“Loudoun; not a doubt. I’m afraid he’s dead. It looks like suicide. There’s a piece of paper near his hand.”

“I’m coming in with you,” said Catherine. He did not argue. They both went into the room, and she was the first to kneel beside the body.

“Don’t touch him,” said Ian anxiously. Catherine, pale but not faint nor sick at the dreadful sight of the blood, took a mirror out of her handbag and held it to the dead man’s lips. It came away unclouded.

“Yes, he’s dead,” she said. “But, Ian, I don’t think it’s Mr. Loudoun.”

Ian did not heed her for a moment. He was looking at the paper which appeared to have been released from the dead man’s hand. The hand was lying, palm upwards, and with a forefinger covered in blood. On the paper was splashed, apparently with blood and with the letters so roughly printed that it might have been done with the bloody forefinger, the words: *I byde my tyme.* It was the motto of Campbell of Loudoun.

Ian read it, but did not touch the paper. He looked anxiously to see that Catherine touched nothing, either, but she, with knitted brow, was sitting on her heels out of line of the thickened blood, and was gazing at the dead man's hand.

"This isn't Mr. Loudoun," she insisted. At the repetition, Ian looked up sharply.

"It must be Loudoun. It's the image of him," he said. She got up and shook her head with finality.

"It isn't Mr. Loudoun's hand. Don't you remember that I read his hand the night we stayed here, before you carried me to bed? Well, *that's* not the hand I read." She pointed to it. "The lines are as different as can be. I've got the impression I made. I'll show you when we go back. I can *prove*—to the police or anybody else—that *he's* not the man we stayed with. He's awfully like him . . ."

Ian put his arm round her shoulders and they went out into the hall and closed the drawing-room door.

"We shall have to report this, of course," he said, "It's a stinking nuisance. Spoilt our holiday completely, I'm afraid. . . . But, Kate, look here! If this fellow isn't Loudoun, we don't know whether it was this one or *our* Loudoun that we rescued at Uig, do we?"

"And old Morag still isn't here," said Catherine, going to the kitchen and boldly opening the door.

"Come on," said Ian. "Let's go."

"But, Ian, wait a minute . . ."

Catherine hesitated, and glanced up at Ian's granite face.

"I know," he said, grimly, meeting her eye and then drawing her towards the front door. "I know what you mean. But perhaps we'd better not say it. It *could* have been suicide, you know. The wound was in his throat, and, either by luck or judgment, he may have got the carotid artery. That's about an inch and a half below the surface. He'd have been unconscious in five seconds and dead in twelve."

"Could he have written that message in five seconds?"

"No, of course he couldn't. That won't do, then. Anyway, we can leave all that to the police. Better go into Appin, I suppose—or Portnacroish might do. Or shall we report it in Ballachulish? We're on the spot there if they happen to want us again. Yes, that's what we'd better do."

They got the *Kerisaig* under weigh as soon as they could, hastening out of the little Glen Ullich to get to her, and trotting along the road, but the distance back from Portnacroish to Ballachulish seemed twice as long as it was.

"How did you know all that about the carotid artery?" asked Catherine, sitting beside Ian at the controls of the sturdy cutter.

"Learnt a few things like that from a chap in the Indian police—a friend of my father. Why?"

"I just wondered."

"Oh, yes. I could recite you a whole table of the stuff. He made me learn it. We used to have lots of fun—catch-as-catch can, unarmed combat, judo, thuggery of all kinds. You want to look out for yourself if you and I ever scrap. And where did *you* learn not to mind blood and dead men?"

"I did a First Aid Course last year."

"Then you knew about arteries, too?"

"Yes. I think most people do."

"And you're observant. You noticed his hand. Are you *sure* you were right about that?"

"Oh, yes, I am absolutely certain. I never forget a hand I've once read if it's as unusual as Mr. Loudoun's."

"How was his hand unusual? You didn't say so at the time. Just told him the usual rot."

"Well, you can't tell your host that he's got a murderer's hand."

"What?" said Ian loudly.

"Oh, yes. I didn't tell you because—well, palmistry is a discreditable sort of amusement and I'm not going to say I believe in it or anything like that, but it was rather horrid to look at his hand and think—that. That's why I was so startled when you talked about letting a murderer loose. And that's why, that first time, I just hated going to bed and leaving you to spend hours with him downstairs, especially as we thought he might be insane."

"I see your point," said Ian, grinning. "Look here, as soon as we've reported finding him, we'd better go to the hotel and wait until Laura and her boss turn up from this tour. Mrs. Bradley will tell us what to do."

"Yes, I should think she would. Ian, has it struck you that that message could have been written by the murderer after the man was dead?"

"There was the finger, all blood. You spotted that?"

"Yes, of course I did. But if it were suicide, the dead man couldn't have written it with his own blood if the carotid artery had been severed. We argued that. Do you think it was murder faked to look like a suicide?"

"Goodness knows. Don't suggest that to the police. We don't want to be witnesses at a trial."

"They wouldn't listen if I did suggest it. Anyway, it isn't our business."

"The law might say that it was."

"The law has nothing to do with what I mean."

"I know what you mean, and I agree. I say, Kate, Mrs. Bradley's a doctor."

"What about it?"

"She's interested in murder. I think I told you. Loudoun—she was going to take on Loudoun as a patient. Why shouldn't we give her first look at the body? It might solve a lot of our problems."

"She may not be back to-day. They don't know when to expect her back, they said. Besides, this dead man wasn't her patient if he wasn't Mr. Loudoun, was he?"

"But, Kate, if you're right about that, she may not have attended the man—*our* Loudoun! She may have attended this one by mistake. That would account for a lot of things! Don't you see?"

"What things?"

"Well, Loudoun being in Skye when we'd thought of him at Craigullich. Old Morag's disappearance the morning we left—or even the night before. Those men in charge of Loudoun on Skye. They were probably friends of this man who's now killed. I say, Kate, we *are* in the soup if it doesn't turn out to be suicide!"

"Why?"

"Well, whose fault is it if the man has been murdered by Loudoun? Mine, for setting Loudoun free! I'm an accessory before the fact, my girl."

"Oh, nonsense," said Catherine calmly. "You can't be that unless you know what you're doing. We didn't know he would come back here and murder someone, did we?"

"I should say I'm morally responsible."

"Oh, don't be so morbid, darling. And aren't you glad we bought these new oilskins for the honeymoon?" She pulled her sou'wester further on to her head. The loch was dancing with rain.

“Damn and blast the rain,” said Ian. “I wonder how long it will last?”

“On and off, for days and days,” said his wife. “I think, I really do, that we should be morally justified in going first to the hotel to change our clothes.”

As, by the time they reached Ballachulish, the rain was coming down like a skyful of mountain cataracts, although it soon afterwards ceased, Ian fell in with this plan. Mrs. Bradley and Laura got back in the late afternoon.

Chapter Nine

★

Cruachan! (A mountain near Loch Awe)

War cry of the Campbells of Argyll, the Campbells of Breadalbane, the Campbells of Loudoun, and of the Clan MacIntyre

★

So much intrigued had Mrs. Bradley been with Laura's account of the artist-extraordinary and his paintbrush full of water that, in spite of the danger, difficulty and sheer inconvenience experienced in essaying such a feat after the torrential rain of the earlier part of the day, she insisted upon scrambling up to the corrie in order to see what the artist and Laura had seen.

Laura accompanied her up the treacherous, slippery slopes, and indicated the exact spot upon which his folding stool had been perched.

Mrs. Bradley derived little satisfaction and little added knowledge from her exploit. If the artist had been on watch, he could only have been watching the road, and not very much of that. They slithered down again and concluded their journey to Ballachulish, arriving at four o'clock, in time, as Laura gladly remarked, for tea.

It was not only tea that awaited them, but also Ian and Catherine, full of nervous excitement, news, comment, questions, and fears. Mrs. Bradley listened to everything, and answered the questions. She then expressed her determination to go at once in the car to Craigullich to see what there was to be seen.

"What, before tea?" asked Laura, in blank dismay.

"I don't want *you,* in any case," said Mrs. Bradley. "I can manage to drive the car."

"You're not going there without me," said Laura sturdily, "and I'm sorry I spoke. I can have tea when I come back."

"Nonsense, child. Stay here and have your tea and talk to your brother."

"No, to Kate," said Ian. He got up, looking tall and extremely lazy. "I'll drive the car, Mrs. Bradley. You can have no objection to that."

"No objection at all," said Mrs. Bradley, looking at the set of his jaw. "It is very kind of you, my dear."

So the two went off together. Laura grinned at Catherine, and then ordered tea.

"Well," she observed, "that's that. I suppose the police will have moved the corpse by now, so there's not much point in trailing over there. I like to see Ian act the all-protecting male. In the present case it's beautifully idiotic."

"Why?" demanded Catherine, up in arms on behalf of her spouse, whose chivalry she secretly admired.

"Mrs. Croc. could protect two like him," said his sister carelessly. "She could make an iron bar squeal by gripping it, and she can throw knives like people in a circus, and fire a revolver from her skirt pocket."

"You must have a lovely job," said Catherine with gentle irony. Laura grinned, and looked suddenly like her brother.

"It suits me, anyway," she said. Their eyes met. They laughed. In the car, already miles down the road towards Appin, Ian and Mrs. Bradley were talking.

"I knew you anticipated dirty work," said he, "when you wouldn't have Laura with you. She'll be bitterly disappointed when she hears there's been a scrap. Whom do you expect, by the way? The real Hector Loudoun, or the friends of the dead man?"

"We turn off here, I think," said she. "And the question still remains—who *is* the real Hector Loudoun?"

Ian swung the car sideways into the mouth of the tiny glen that held Craigullich and its sinister little loch. They left the car near the house—as near the house as they could get it—and walked to the door. There was, to Ian, a vast difference between this approach to Craigullich and the one he had made in company with Catherine some few hours previously. Then the atmosphere had been eerie; now it was merely dangerous. He put a large

hand on Mrs. Bradley's deceptively stick-like arm. She nodded. They crept to the threshold like criminals bent on mischief.

The criminals, however, were already within the walls. As they approached, the interlopers could hear the sounds of hammering and tapping, of smashing, rending, and search. They crept away, and went round to the side of the house.

"What's in the wind?" asked Ian. It seemed safe enough to speak, in view of the sounds inside the building, but he kept his voice very low. "Who's looking for what? And why? Do you think it's the police?"

For no very good reason, Mrs. Bradley did not think it was the police. She shook her head.

"They're downstairs," said Ian. "I'll descend on them from above. I ought to get a pretty good idea of who they are, if I can get to the bend in the stairs."

He put his foot in the middle of a thick stem of ivy and climbed to a first-floor window. He had seen that it was open at the top. He disappeared from Mrs. Bradley's view.

She adopted other tactics. Secure in the knowledge that if it were the two men from Skye who were in the house they would not know who she was, she opened the door at the side of the house and walked in. Although it was not more than five o'clock, great clouds had blown over the mountains and the afternoon was overcast and dark. As she reached the dining-room door there was a vivid flash followed by the mutter of the thunder. At the same instant that the thunder died away, through the gloomy house there sounded a sibilant voice.

"They hanged me, they hanged me, my son. Where now is Duror in Appin? Where stands the cairn that was raised for me? Where rest my bones? I died like a dog, and who will speak the word to save me? Who guards the secret, my son? Your father sleeps. You must wake him. Wake him, wake him, my son."

Mrs. Bradley was imaginative in a sense, but not superstitious or nervous. She listened carefully. The voice did not go on. It had done its part. With the speed of overmastering terror, the iconoclasts in the dining-room left their work and tore out into the grounds.

"Interesting," said Mrs. Bradley. Ian, who had come downstairs, did not understand this comment.

"How?" said he.

"Well," she answered, "it looks as though his myrmidons did not follow the mind of Hector."

"Yes, I see. These men did not know anything about the ghost."

"Exactly, child."

"And, if not, why not?"

"Quite."

"In other words, it looks as though . . ."

"As though what?"

"As though the ghost might be a real one."

Mrs. Bradley shook her head.

"I should be sorry to think that," she said. "I am like the historian who preferred the facts to fit his theories."

"I don't believe that. Anyway, what do we do next? Those were the chaps in charge of Loudoun at Uig."

"I think the next part of the problem can be settled at Uig, child. Meanwhile, I should like to see the body."

"But those men are *here.* Do you mean they'll go back to Uig? They know that *I* know where they live, you know."

"It is unlikely that a small croft is their only base."

"That's true. But, from what Catherine and I could make out, they'll need some tackling. If you go, don't take Laura, please. Let's leave her here with Kate. We could do with your nephew, too. Do you think he'd come?"

"I don't need either of you, and I certainly shouldn't lead your sister into danger." She walked across the hall.

"No, no, of course not. I know that. But, all the same, I've met those men. You haven't. And where's the body?"

"I have met them in spirit," said Mrs. Bradley, surveying the drawing-room keenly, "and I did see the back of them as they fled. The police, it seems, have moved the body. I expected to find them in possession of the house."

The police chose this moment to arrive. Time, in the Western Highlands, is of little consequence, and the officers had seen no particular reason for hastening to Craigullich. Mrs. Bradley looked out of the drawing-room window, and saw them approaching the house.

"Here's a pretty how-do-you-do," she said. "The police, and no body for them to find. They will think they've been hoaxed, I'm afraid. Do we

stand our ground, do you think, or shall we follow the example of our friends, and exercise an undignified strategic withdrawal?"

"It's beginning to rain," said Ian.

"An apt observation. If the police are not to be trifled with, neither is the weather. We will stand our ground, then, and combine dignity with comfort—although I suspect that we shall be made to feel less comfortable later on."

The police, however, were charming—charming but deeply perplexed. They did not doubt that there had been a body; they did not think that Mrs. Bradley (whose name, to Ian's secret astonishment, they recognized) had spirited the body away; but they thought that the body ought to be produced, and would make it their business to trace it; they had not the slightest intention of causing anybody any inconvenience, but suggested that, if no objection was raised to their doing so, they should take a look over the house.

Mrs. Bradley referred to the two men who had been in the house when she and Ian had arrived, and Ian described them. He told of his adventures on Skye and how he and his wife had come to the conclusion that the men had been holding the first Hector Loudoun, against his will, a prisoner. The sergeant said wistfully that that was a serious offence, and made a long and elaborate note about it. He then asked, almost shyly, where Mrs. Bradley would be staying, supposing that he needed to get in touch with her. She mentioned the Ballachulish hotel, and Ian, asked the same question, gave the same address, but added that he was thinking of being on his boat, whose name and home port he gave.

The sergeant, who seemed worried at being obliged to ask them any questions at all, accompanied them to the door. He then remarked that it might turn out wet after all, and watched them, as, in the now drenching rain, they splashed across the grounds to their car.

"That's a very astute man," said Mrs. Bradley. "He misses nothing."

Ian, who had also formed this impression of his fellow-countryman but had not imagined that anyone not of Highland blood would have come to the same conclusion, looked at her with respect. The police had been summoned from Oban.

"I noticed," he said, as, with the car flinging up mud, grass, and bits of heather and rattling small sharp stones underneath its mudguards like boys

rattling sticks along a fence, they drove off past the loch and through the glen, “then you did not mention the ghost.”

Mrs. Bradley cackled.

“The ghost is far enough now,” she reflected aloud.

“You think it was Loudoun? The first Loudoun? *Our* Loudoun, I mean.”

She cackled again, but did not answer the question.

“When shall we go to Skye?” he asked, as they swung out on to the highroad and headed for Ballachulish ferry.

“At once, child. We mustn’t lose time.”

A surprise awaited them at the hotel. Deborah, Jonathan, and the boy Brian, tired of the rain, which had fallen in torrents even as far inland as they had penetrated, had returned to Ballachulish so that, as Deborah observed, the whole party could be wet and depressed together.

“Depressed? Nonsense!” said her husband. “To see the West Highlands you must see them in pouring rain. This scenery was made for rain. Look at it, you little philistine! Look at that for colour!”

Deborah looked out of the window. The sea-loch was the colour of slate except where the wind whipped it white. The green and wine and yellow of its banks swam all in puddled mist like a rainbow flattened and diffused.

“Laura and I are going to Skye,” she remarked, with her back to her husband.

“The rain will be worse there,” said he; but Ian said quickly and loudly:

“Laura isn’t going to Skye.”

“Oh, yes, she is,” said his sister. “She is going to Skye as soon as she’s had her breakfast to-morrow morning.”

“You and your food!” said Brian. “Am I to go to Skye? I’m not very keen at the moment. I was going fishing to-morrow.”

“That’s quite all right,” said Mrs. Bradley, giving him a reptilian, affectionate smile. “You shall go fishing to-morrow. You can stay here until we come back, if you like, and Deborah, Laura, and Catherine will stay too.”

“Not Laura,” said her secretary firmly. “I am going to Skye if I swim. Nobody need argue,” she added, fixing her eyes on her brother.

"You're crazy," he said gloomily; but offered no further opposition, knowing it to be useless. The evening, being overcast, soon darkened. Mrs. Bradley, discussing the point with Ian, came to the conclusion that, unless the men had a car, they were not very likely to cross to Skye that night, as the weather was bad for boats which went from Loch Linnhe and the Sound of Mull round Ardnamurchan Point and north past Eigg Island. In a car the journey could be made from Ballachulish up to Fort William and from Fort William out to Mallaig where there was a ferry to Ardvasar across the Sound of Sleat. Even so, it was a secondary road to Mallaig. It ran along the shores of Loch Eil through Glenfinnan and beside the small Loch Eilt, and, especially in such appalling weather, Mrs. Bradley did not think the men would make the journey that night, either by road or water. There was the faint possibility that they might have travelled by train, but to do that they would have needed to get first to Fort William. The railway then followed the road-route through Glenfinnan.

In any case, even if the men returned to Skye, there seemed to be no desperate need of haste on the part of their pursuers.

"Bed," said Mrs. Bradley, "and early, I suggest. Then the four of us will go off first thing in the morning."

This plan, simple and sensible, did not mature as early as she had hoped. Late that night a police message came to the hotel. The body—or, as the message more cautiously and conservatively ran—*a* body had been found, and it would be convenient to have it identified as soon as might be. Mrs. Bradley and her party could, it was understood, be of some assistance. Would the persons concerned be good enough to meet the police at Oban on the morning of Monday as might be convenient for them? The police would be greatly obliged.

The Sabbath, it seemed, was no day for viewing bodies or otherwise assisting the police. On the other hand, so gentle and courteous a request could not be cavilled at. Early on Monday Mrs. Bradley, Laura, Catherine, and Ian went by car south through Portnacroish and Appin and across Loch Etive to Oban. The sergeant, reinforced this time by an inspector and two policemen, all four having the surname of Cameron and being named respectively Euan, Colenso, Andrew, and James, met them and took them in to view the body.

Again it was Catherine who could identify the man in the negative sense.

"This is not the man we call Hector Loudoun," said she.

"You will be telling us what you mean by that," suggested the inspector.

"Yes. You see, my husband and I are on holiday here, and on our first day we met a man who called himself Hector Loudoun, but who indicated to us that his name might not be Loudoun at all. I hurt my ankle, and he very kindly allowed us to stay the night in his house, Craigullich, and sent us back to Ballachulish in his car on the following morning. He would have gone with us, but his housekeeper disappeared, and he was anxious to know where she was. Well, while we were at the house I read his hand."

"I do not understand that."

"Palmistry, you know. Not fortune-telling. Just reading his character and—and his qualities and talents. It was only in fun, but he had rather an interesting hand, and, you see, *this* man's hand"—she indicated the sheeted figure which they had been summoned to identify—"this man's hand isn't the same."

"You are saying that this man is not Hector Loudoun?"

"He is not the man who introduced himself to us as Hector Loudoun."

"But you cannot tell us the name of this man here?"

"No. I can only say that, although he is very, very like him, he is not the man we met."

"But," interposed Mrs. Bradley, "he is the man *I* met and he encouraged me to believe that he was the man whom my friends here had left at Craigullich looking for his housekeeper."

"And what had happened to his housekeeper?" asked the inspector.

"I don't know. All I know is that an old woman (who did not fail to correspond with the description given of old Morag), let me in when I called, but I learned that her name was Ellen."

"Why would you have been calling on Hector Loudoun?"

"In response to a message saying that he wished for advice."

"Advice?"

"Professional advice."

"Och, aye. You'll be a psychiatrist, and you'll be a doctor of medicine. What was the matter with him?"

"Nothing, except for a guilty conscience."

"That would have been this dead man here, you're thinking?"

"It *was* this man here, to the best of my knowledge and belief."

“You identify him, then?”

“I identify him as the man I knew as Hector Loudoun.”

“Aye. There would seem to be a mystery here. Why should a man impersonate another?”

“I have no idea, unless he could gain something from it.”

“You’ll have formed a theory, no doubt, about that?”

“About a dozen theories, but we have not very much to build on. All I can say is that the impersonation might easily have been successful, so long as no one who knew either man very well was brought to the house.”

“This old woman of whom you are speaking: what of her?”

“I don’t know anything about either of the old women I have mentioned, except that the one I did not meet, whose name is Morag or Minnie, is said to be mad, but the one I did meet, whose name is Ellen, certainly is not mad, and has disappeared like the other.”

“Well, well! There was nobody in the house except for your two selves yesterday?”

“No one, except the two men who ran away when they heard what they thought was a ghost.”

“A ghost?”

“Yes.”

“Were you also hearing this ghost?”

“Yes.”

“What would it have been, now?”

“I think it was the voice of a living person.”

“What would be causing you to think so?”

“I had had a previous experience of the voice.”

“When you went to give Hector Loudoun your advice?”

“Yes. I had thought that the first Hector Loudoun (you will understand that *my* Hector Loudoun is this dead man here) himself was telling lies about the ghost-voice. Then I discovered that the second Loudoun knew nothing about the ghost, which spoke on the night I was there—or, rather, in the early morning. I was not in the room when the voice spoke, but I knew at the time that it was a human voice, and not the ghost-voice, which I heard.”

“And what are you thinking now? It could not have been this man who spoke in the ghost voice yesterday?”

“I agree.”

"Can you not be giving us any help? It is the strange story you're telling us. If it should be anybody else that was telling me the same story, I am not very sure I would believe it."

He looked apologetic but spoke firmly. Mrs. Bradley cackled, and he seemed to recognize this as an expression of sympathy for him in his dilemma, for he smiled at her with great sweetness before he turned to Catherine.

"And were *you* hearing the ghost that night you stayed in the house?"

"No," she answered. "But I think there was at least one more person in the house that night than had been accounted for."

"What would you be meaning by that?"

"I can't tell you. It was an opinion I formed, and my husband shared it."

The inspector looked at Ian, who nodded and then confirmed what Catherine had said.

"Loudoun and I searched the policies," he said, "but it would have been easy enough, I think, for anyone to get away that meant to do so. I certainly heard somebody moving about in the house before Loudoun and I went outside, and, later, I heard a man cough, and the cough was inside the house."

"You could identify this other Loudoun if you were to be seeing him?"

"Certainly—now. But I don't know that, if both were alive, I would be certain of knowing them apart. They are much alike in height and build, and their faces seem to me like the faces of twins. You would have to know both very well to be sure which was which, I should think."

"Mrs. Menzies, though, could tell them apart by their hands?"

"Yes," said Catherine, answering for herself.

"You have no proof, I suppose?"

"I can't prove it to anyone's satisfaction but my own, unless you would accept as proof this print which I took at the time I read Mr. Loudoun's hand."

"Why should you have been taking a print of his hand?"

"To study, at my leisure, what I had told him in the quickness of the moment. I was surprised at the appearance of his hand."

"Would it have been an unusual type of hand?"

"Very."

"A hand, then, that had an interest for you?"

"As a student of palmistry, yes."

"I am wondering what special interest it would have."

"A general interest. It was unlike any hand I had seen. It was—well, a criminal's hand."

"Och, aye. And you have a print of this hand?"

"I've brought it, if you'd care to look at it. It's a bit smudgy, I'm afraid, because I haven't fixed it properly, and it's only done in candle-smoke. It ought to be done with the stuff you use for fingerprints. But you can see the lines well enough, I think, to be able to compare them with the lines on this dead man's hand."

The inspector and the sergeant made close comparison and were satisfied, especially when Catherine added helpful and illuminating comments. Mrs. Bradley also studied the lines, using a magnifying glass in order to do so, and lending it then to the inspector.

"And now," she said offhandedly, as the inspector folded the handle of the glass across its face and handed it back, "where did you find the body?"

"A shepherd found it on Beinn Cruachan. A man stopped him on the road and told him where he would be finding it. We were going there to look again at the place."

"We'll all go," said Mrs. Bradley expansively. The inspector looked doubtful. The sergeant pulled at the ends of his moustache. Neither made any verbal objection, however, and the sergeant was heard to murmur to the inspector that it might be as well that they should be on their way before those lads from Fort William would be hearing about the matter.

Beinn Cruachan, lifting his peaks nearly thirty-seven hundred feet at the northern end of Loch Awe, was distant less than twelve miles from Oban, and the road was passable. The body had been found by a shepherd named Donald MacBain in one of the corries. It did not look as though there had been much attempt to hide it. The police made a careful search of the ground, and, taking their findings (and Catherine) with them, went modestly back to their car, leaving Mrs. Bradley and Ian to explore the surroundings at their leisure.

"Must have brought him by car," said Ian. "They've brought him too far in the time to have used any other means. It must have been a tough business getting him into the corrie. Would have taken two men all their time. One couldn't have done it alone."

"What about three?" asked Mrs. Bradley.

"You mean our Loudoun may have double-crossed the other Loudoun as well as murdered him? He may have persuaded the two men who were acting nursemaid on Skye to come over into his side of the ring? It's possible, I suppose, but I should also call it pretty doubtful."

"Very well. We'll say two," Mrs. Bradley agreed. "Er—which two?"

"Which two?"

"Yes."

"Um . . . yes," said Ian thoughtfully. "So far, you mean, we've got the two men against the one Loudoun. He'd have had an accomplice if he murdered his half-brother and put the body here."

"It was *your* suggestion that he had an accomplice, child."

"Well, do *you* see how he got the body into this corrie alone? It's fairly high up the mountain; it was a good old scramble, even for us, who are carrying nothing except your camera. *Could* one man have brought a body up here by himself?"

"Yes, he might; or a woman might have helped him."

"Old Morag?"

"I don't see why not."

"But she must be over seventy! Besides, she disappeared, and we've no evidence that she's ever reappeared."

"We've no evidence except Mr. Loudoun's word (and we have yet to prove that that is entirely reliable!) that she ever disappeared, child. Why do you suppose," she went on, before Ian could speak, "I never troubled about her? Why do you think I did not put the police upon her track?"

"I see." He pondered the matter. "Well, that being that, what about getting back? There's nothing more to do here."

"On the contrary, there is a great deal more to do here. It's a pity the weather turned wet. The heather is still very damp, and it's going to rain again soon. One thing comforts me. We should not, in any case, have been able to light a fire."

"But what are we going to do?"

"We are going to wait."

"What for?"

"For the two men who are coming to find the body."

"But the body's already been found."

"I know; *you* know; the police know; but I think it just possible that the two men do not know."

"But . . ."

"It is just my fancy, child. Do not stay unless you wish."

"Of course I shall stay if you do. But I can't see why you think they'll come. How should they know where to look if you're right, and they are not the blokes who planted it?"

"They may have been notified, child."

"By the murderer?"

"It is possible."

"But why? To lead them into a trap?"

"I don't know, child. I don't even know that they're coming."

"But why should you think they might come?"

"Did it never strike you that there was something very odd in Mr. Ure's having wanted to purchase Glen Ullich?"

"It seemed idiotic—at least, his reason did."

"True."

"Well?"

"Well, either the story, or that part of it, as told by Loudoun, was false, and Ure never made any such proposition…"

"Yes?"

"Or else it was true, although it may be that the reason given was false. . . ."

"Yes?"

"In which case there is something more to be learned about Craigullich—something which, so far, we do not know. Something which, possibly, Loudoun himself did not know."

"It was certainly a very odd story."

"I've thought a great deal about that story," said Mrs. Bradley, "and about the curious fact that on the night *you* were at Craigullich the ghost refused to perform. On the two occasions, however, when *I* have been at Craigullich, the ghost has done rather well. What do we deduce from that?"

"That the ghost wished to impress *you,* but thought that *I* was not important, and did not need to be impressed," said Ian, grinning.

"Can't you think of anything better than that, child?"

"Well, perhaps I am not a medium. Perhaps you are."

"Better; but still not good. You had better work it out. We have plenty of time, I expect. In any case, we have a good view of the road, and you will be able to recognize the quarry before they can get sight of us."

"What do we do when they spot us?"

"I hope they won't. Perhaps we had better remove ourselves before they come to the corrie."

"This way, then. Lucky we've nails in our boots. Can you climb?"

"Sufficiently, child."

"Can you manage the *col* over there?"

"I think we should be seen against the skyline."

"Not enough to be recognized on an overcast day like this."

"I prefer the *larig* yonder. It looks like a waterfall now, but I think it is quite a good path in better weather."

"You don't mean to leave any tracks, I suppose? All right. It's a bit of a scramble. Are you sure you can do it?"

"Oh, yes, it's only a trickle. We must chance the coming down at the end."

"We can maybe work over to the left, and get back to the road without returning to this corrie. There should be a bit of a glen. I climbed here once, with a chap who wasn't much good. We did the easy bits, and I think I remember that one. What about the car, by the way? They'll spot it, and wonder whose it is."

"It's well hidden. They shouldn't find it. I gave instructions to the sergeant. My only fear is lest he has hidden it too well. If he has, we must walk back to Oban."

The rain they had anticipated held off for another hour. Slipping, scrambling, scratched, and perspiring, they reached the position of vantage they had chosen, and were able to get a good view into the corrie without there being much chance that they themselves would be seen. Almost as soon as they were settled, lying on their stomachs on the harsh and saturated heather, with the sounds of leaping water in their ears and the peaks of Cruachan shrouded in mist and cloud above their heads, the rain came on again.

"We'll never be able to swear to them in this," said Ian dolefully. Mrs. Bradley, her ordinarily yellow cheeks red with the exercise and the rain, grinned cheerfully at him.

"We'll manage, child," she said. "At the worst, we shall have to stalk them."

To Ian, who had stalked deer, the idea was not unwelcome. He had realized, too, during the breath-taking scramble in which they had just

indulged, that his elderly companion would be no mean performer at a game in which muscle and temper, skill, boldness, and patience all played a considerable part.

"Attaboy!" said he. Mrs. Bradley produced a pocket flask and a packet of sandwiches. The next quarter of an hour passed by. The mist crept closer around them. Ian, folding the sandwich papers preparatory to pocketing them so as not to leave them on the mountainside either as an eyesore or a clue, looked about him dubiously. "We shan't get down to the road in this if we don't start at once," said he. "I'm awfully sorry, but Cruachan has beaten us, I'm afraid."

"Right," said Mrs. Bradley, proving that the elderly are as self-disciplined as the young. "Lead the way, then, child."

But Cruachan was their friend, after all. As Ian was crawling from behind a rock where a false step might have sent smaller boulders crashing down the hillside and so given away their presence to anyone within a quarter of a mile of the *larig,* he almost trod on a hand. He went to ground immediately, and Mrs. Bradley, behind him, sank up to her knees in the stream that was racing between two boulders and over a natural step of rock like a dyke-ditch got up and gone berserk, and nobly hid herself from view.

Ian remained without moving. The hand was withdrawn and reappeared higher up the hillside and about a foot to the left. For a moment Ian thought that he must be discovered, but he was not. He waited where he was for five minutes. Then, beckoning his companion, he crawled up over a tiny neck thick with heather, slid his long body into a runnel choked with last year's bracken fronds, craned his neck, and beckoned Mrs. Bradley again. Faithful as any henchman, wisp-haired, bedraggled, and wet, she crawled up beside him. Their quarry was well in view. Standing on a flattened part of the hillside and studying a map already rotting through with the rain, were men whom Ian had recognized immediately. Mrs. Bradley drew out her binoculars and feasted her eyes on a couple of unintelligent, pugnacious, and puzzled faces.

She put away the binoculars. The men put away their map and were soon using arms and legs in scrambling down the face of a small, steep corrie.

Ian touched Mrs. Bradley's arm. They pursued their silent way towards the road.

Neither spoke until they had found the car and started her up. The men had also brought a car. At any rate, one was drawn up at the roadside on the side of a partly-developed quarry.

"It was the two we met on Skye all right," said Ian. "Will you know them again, do you think?"

"I know them now, child. I saw them a year ago when I visited Pentonville prison."

"Good Lord! They really are criminals!"

"I prefer to say that they *were,* child. However, their presence here should tell us something, although what it is, I think Time alone will show."

"Laura will relish this," said Laura's brother. "She likes anything criminal and low. Even when she was a child she liked a comic paper which featured a bloke called Tom the Ticket-of-Leave Man. Shall you tell the police about those fellows?"

"Yes. We don't know what they're up to, but I think we may assume that it can't be anything good. Their names are Lauzi and Potter."

"I'm glad they're not Scotsmen," said Ian.

Chapter Ten

★

The Cormorant's Rock!
Creag an Sgairbh!

War cry of the Stewarts of Appin

★

The new day, like a girl ashamed of her tempestuous weeping, dawned shyly. It found the augmented crew of the *Kerisaig* already on board. Their comings and goings astonished no one at the Ballachulish hotel, where the staff were accustomed to the vagaries and enthusiasm of the summer visitors. Therefore, the fact that five of the guests—for the lad Brian had requested that he might make one of the party after all—should sneak out at five in the morning was accepted as normal and unremarkable.

Maggie MacIntyre, one of the maids, had seen to it that they went out fortified with porridge, eggs, bacon, bread, butter, and honey, and had accomplished what she described as 'weetin' the caufee on ye,' the better to prepare them for their trip. Laura, Brian, and Ian had eaten well, Mrs. Bradley sparingly, and Jonathan moderately, but all had enjoyed the breakfast and Maggie Maclntyre's motherly waiting. She was just nineteen, a soft-eyed, tender-mouthed, gently-spoken, and deceptively biddable girl. She came from Mull, and worked at the hotel from June until early in September.

Jonathan and Ian went up to say good-bye to their wives. Catherine, drowsy, and Deborah, lovely, stretched white arms from under the bedcovers and bade their husbands take care of themselves and come back soon.

"Sure!" said Ian laughing, and kissing Catherine. "Anyway, you don't really know what you're talking about. You're more than half asleep."

“Don’t worry, darling,” said Jonathan, kneeling beside the bed and taking his wife in his arms. “We shall be all right, or my aunt wouldn’t take young Brian.”

“If it *is* all right, why does she want you and Ian? Why *both* of you, if it’s all right?”

“Stop fussing of the poor dumb animal, because I don’t really know. Anyway, she *does* want us both, and young Laura, too. I imagine we shall take points of vantage for purposes of observation and report. Hem!”

“You’re so silly,” said Deborah, kissing the short harsh hairs on the nape of his neck. “Darling, you’ve always just had your hair cut. Why don’t you grow it long, like your Cousin Carey? Then it wouldn’t prick. Well, I suppose you’ll have to go, or you’ll keep them all waiting, and Laura will tease you. Do you mind being teased about me?”

He did not respond in words, and had to sprint all the way to the moorings to catch up the rest of the party.

“Now, then,” said Laura disapprovingly. “You’re not going away for a year!”

He slapped her, a good, swinging, round-arm smack which made her yell, and then twitched off her beret. They wrestled for it, and Laura got it back upon a shout from Ian for all to get aboard.

It was not yet fully light, and in misty gold the *Kerisaig* put off from Ballachulish and ran spiritedly out towards the Sound of Mull.

“Be a bit dirty after Lismore,” said Ian, above the sound of the engine, as the long green island slid alongside, and then began to drop astern. “Bound to be heavy rollers after the weather we’ve been having.”

That weather, however, appeared to be a thing of the past. The day had brightened and was seen to be tremulously blue. The mountains in view from the cruiser, whether to east or west, the long range of Benderloch with Cruachan in the southern distance, the hills of Morvern and the approaching mountains of Mull, had all their tops misty and clouded, but there were rainbows in the seas, and, in spite of the freshening breeze, the weather already was warmer.

The seas deepened to green. The Sound was a tumbling battle between rollers surging in from the Atlantic and the quieter coastal tides. Jonathan and Ian nursed the cruiser. She tossed and plunged past Lochaline on Morvern, and on past the mountains of Mull. The steamer route dipped in to Salan, but the *Kerisaig* held on her way, passed Tobermory harbour, and

faced the heavy seas where the Sound of Mull met Loch Sunart. In the distance could be seen the tiny bay behind which lay the village of Kilchoan in Ardnamurchan.

"This is grand!" said Laura, bailing water out of the cockpit, her beret discarded and her hair almost blown off her head. The boy Brian, not a good sailor, was not so enthusiastic. Jonathan had taken the controls; Ian and Mrs. Bradley sat in the little saloon with an Ordnance map of Skye pinned out on the table. The land changed shape and rocked now high now low on the starboard side of the cutter. The breeze still freshened. They beat round Ardnamurchan Point and found the full force of the wind. The cruiser shook, shivered, and plunged. Her screw raced, suddenly plucked from its element, the water, by the downward swing of the boat to the trough of the sea. Northward she beat, and northward, plunging back her screw and lifting her nose with a dire extreme of clumsily-contrived equilibrium like the recovery of a pecking racehorse. Brian was frankly sick; and was steered by the practised hand of Laura Menzies to the leeward side of the cruiser just in time.

"That's better," she said, letting go of the slack of his jacket. "Lie down for a bit in the saloon."

"I'm all right," said the boy; and, boy-like, remained on deck; and, boy-like, felt much better in the next ten minutes or so, and got another dipper and helped her bail. The cutter took water chiefly over the bows, as the experienced Jonathan kept her head to the seas, but sometimes a boisterous comber slapped in over her quarter and once or twice she got a broadside which nearly washed the whole crew overboard.

"Exhilarating," said Mrs. Bradley, coming on deck and receiving the wind in her face and a slap of cold water down her arm.

"Glad you think so," said Laura. "We're almost off Arisaig, I think."

Arisaig and Mallaig were passed, and they entered the Sound of Sleat. To make Uig in such a wind, the two young men had decided to run up the Sound, beat up past Kyle of Loch Alsh and work round the north of the island in the hope that the southward passage from Rudha Hunish and Score Bay might be preferable to the north-west trip from the Point of Sleat and up the Atlantic coast of the island.

The seas were so rough and strong, however, that they put into harbour at Portree, having almost decided to hire a car from the hotel and cross the island by road to Uig Bay.

Portree harbour was amazingly calm considering the seas outside, and the little quiet town, flanked by its headland of woods and with the low hills rising behind it, looked slight and almost delicate, a sketch of a town rather than a collection of the habitations of men. A tower rose out of the woods, and beyond them lay a long cape, looking black against the light of the day.

The crew went ashore for lunch. By two in the afternoon it had been decided to run as far north as Kilmaluig, although Laura was heard to enquire, 'Why tempt the stormy firth to-day?' when the point was under discussion. She was so far right that a further conclave was held on the northward run.

However, the general feeling was in favour of continuing to Uig. Mrs. Bradley took no part in the discussion, and, although her opinion was canvassed, she did not give it. Laura turned apostate and spoke eloquently in favour of continuing the cruise (by this time dignified by the title of voyage), and even Brian, now in full possession of his sea-legs, put in a plea for going on to Uig. Jonathan was doubtful, Ian anxious to go on.

The seas on the north cape of Syke were mountainous. Half the time *Kerisaig* appeared, even to her devoted owner Ian, to be under the water more often than in it or on it.

Drenched to the skin, exhilarated and occasionally somewhat alarmed, the crew clung deliriously to their craft and commended their souls to the gods of the Northmen who had made safe passage to Skye and had written the story of their landfalls in the names they had given to most of the places on the island.

Whether for this reason or some other, the *Kerisaig* made safe passage and came to anchor in the little roadsteads of Uig Bay. She carried no dinghy, but signals from the boat to the shore soon brought small boats to the rescue, and the party landed, and, led by Ian, went straight to the house of the MacDonalds.

Here they received a great welcome, and, as they had brought a change of clothes, they were soon warm and dry, and the question of lodgings was discussed. There seemed likely to be some little difficulty about this, as the party was oddly assorted from the point of view of being able to share rooms. Mrs. Bradley, not by her own wish, but by common consent, was allotted the best bedroom in the house, and Jonathan and the boy received shakedown accommodation on the ground floor. Laura had the small bedroom, and Ian was taken to the two-roomed croft of the MacIver

family, where he shared a room with young Roderick MacIver, who smelt of fish but was otherwise companionable.

As soon as his lodging was settled and he had had conversation with the MacIver family, Ian went with Rory MacIver—Malcolm's elder brother—to the boat the MacIvers owned, and the two rowed out to where the house in which Ian was interested could be seen against the skyline. He had brought his binoculars from the *Kerisaig* and now trained them on to the croft.

"What would you be wishing to see?" asked Rory, resting on his oars whilst the boat, rocking heavily, threatened to throw Ian overboard.

"The last croft there."

"Two of her brother's sons are after having it from the old woman," said MacIver. "Nobody knows them, but they tell us their father was married on a woman in Australia."

"You don't like them?" said Ian. Rory bent to his oars and grunted.

"They do not fish, and they do not work the croft, and they do not dig peat. I do not know what they do, nor why they are here. There are those that are saying they are spies. They are up to no good, whatever it may be, whatever."

"They've taken the old lady's name, then?"

"Aye. But they call themselves Thomas and James. Never were those two names in the family of Mrs. MacShuffie. I do not like it."

"I've been told that they've been in prison," said Ian. "Let's row on for a bit, and then I'll get back to the others."

"You'll not be the police?"

"Oh, no, of course not. But we happen to be interested in those fellows. There are two dead men in Lochaber, and nothing to account for their deaths."

He told Rory as much of the story as would allay curiosity.

"A ghost that talks?" said Rory thoughtfully, when they had brought the boat in and were walking back to the house. "Well, well! I could tell you things that might surprise you about that, too."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Ian. "The Quiraing, for example. Isn't that said to be haunted? And on Bealach a' Mhorghain . . ."

"Indeed, yes. I would not care to be on that pass on a dark night with the west wind blowing, no, indeed!"

Both laughed, but Rory changed the subject by suggesting that they were coming a long way round if Ian wanted to visit the croft they had seen from the sea.

"I am not the person to visit it by daylight," said Ian. "They know me. Besides, the last time I went I did quite the wrong thing. I thought to set free a prisoner, but I think I unleashed a hound of hell."

This view he had already put to Mrs. Bradley. She had not agreed with it, neither had she dissented from it. There was, in her mind, no proof of it one way or the other, and this she stated. It did not much comfort Ian, who felt responsible for the death of the second Loudoun.

"We shall get very little further until we know the whole of the Loudoun story," she had said; "and, in any case, we do not know who killed the second Loudoun." As he tramped beside Rory after they had climbed the steep path up the face of the cliff and were coming in sight of MacDonalds' house, he was thinking over those words. He went indoors to find that Mrs. Bradley had prepared and had studied a timetable of those events which had fallen within the knowledge of herself or her party. It was helpful in forming theories, but that was all. At her own request, Laura had been permitted to copy it. She had written in her large and characteristic handwriting:

Monday. First week. Ian married to Catherine in London.

Tuesday. Ian and Catherine on first day of their honeymoon meet Mrs. Bradley and party, and, later, Hector Loudoun (A). They stay the night at Craigullich.

Queries. Was the unknown man murdered on this day?

Did Loudoun (A) know of the murder?

Does that account for the state of his nerves?

Is the dead man Mr. Ure (Stewart)?

Wednesday. Disappearance of old Morag, the housekeeper at Craigullich. Mrs. Bradley pays her first visit to Craigullich and meets not Loudoun (A) but, it seems, Loudoun (B). They may be twins. Mrs. Bradley returns to Ballachulish, but goes back in the evening to Craigullich, stays the night, hears the 'ghost-voice,' and observes its terrifying effect on Loudoun (B).

Laura, with others, goes to Kinlochleven on this day, and stays at the house of Janet Forbes, formerly employed at Craigullich. Ian and Catherine rejoin auxiliary cutter *Kerisaig.*

Thursday. Laura hears Janet Forbes' gossip about the Stewart family and forms theory that there may have been an illegitimate child (or twins) born to Lorna Stewart during the absence of her husband abroad.

Friday. Laura leaves rest of party at Kinlochleven and takes short walking tour to see part of Rannoch Moor. Body discovered on Rannoch Moor by shepherd, and transported by him and others to shepherd's hut. Seen there by Laura. Ian and Catherine with *Kerisaig* as before.

Saturday. Laura returns to Ballachulish and meets mad artist in Glencoe.

Sunday. The Sabbath. Kept as such in respect for local observances. Day spent very quietly in hotel.

Monday. Second week. Mrs. Bradley, Laura, and Jonathan to Rannoch Moor. Identification of place where body was discovered by shepherd.

Tuesday. Laura to Inverness to read paper before learned gathering. Ian and Catherine on Skye.

Wednesday. Paper read, and Laura free to return. Ian and Catherine meet Loudoun (A) under guard in Skye.

Thursday. Laura returns to Ballachulish, and meets mad artist (now sane but amateur pedlar) who explains that he was to meet Stewart. (This seems to confirm theory that Stewart is dead man on Rannoch Moor.) Ian and Catherine decide to return to Ballachulish.

Friday. Mrs. Bradley and Laura try to find why the dead man went on to Rannoch Moor. Spend night at Kingshouse inn. Miss the return of Ian and Catherine.

Saturday. Mrs. Bradley and Laura return to Ballachulish. Ian and Catherine go early to Craigullich and discover body of the second Loudoun (Loudoun B) in dining-room. Catherine's reading of his hand makes it certain at this point that the theory that there have been two Loudouns is correct. In the late afternoon Mrs. Bradley and Laura are reunited with Ian and Catherine. Mrs. Bradley and Ian go to Craigullich and discover the two 'guards' in the house. The body has disappeared. Jonathan, Deborah, and Brian return to Ballachulish because of the weather. The police find the body of Loudoun (B) in a corrie on Beinn Cruachan.

Sunday. Spent very quietly at the hotel.

Monday. Third week. Mrs. Bradley, Laura, Catherine, and Ian to Oban to identify the body of Loudoun (B) found on Beinn Cruachan. Thence Mrs.

Bradley and Ian to see the place where it was found. They see also the ‘guards’ of Loudoun (A) from Skye.

Tuesday. Mrs. Bradley, Laura, Jonathan, Ian, and Brian to Skye.

Notes 1. The second Loudoun may be named Alexander.

2. The recurrent note is the little loch.

Early next day Mrs. Bradley and Jonathan climbed the hill-slope to the croft which had once been tenanted by the Widow MacShuffie, and, choosing a point of vantage neither too far from it for their purpose, which was to identify the men Mrs. Bradley and Ian had seen on the side of Beinn Cruachan, nor too near it to excite suspicion, seated themselves on their waterproof coats, spread out books and a picnic basket brought from one of the lockers on the *Kerisaig* and prepared to spend, if necessary, the major part of the day in what might prove to be a monotonous and unprofitable vigil.

They were rewarded, however, at the end of the first half hour. The two men came out of the little house, descended the cliff-face and, gaining the harbour, put off, with one of the islanders, in a fishing boat. Through binoculars Mrs. Bradley watched the progress of the boat, and kept it in view until it disappeared round a headland south of Uig, as though it might be making for the inner reaches of Loch Snizort. The boat had made, she judged from her Ordnance map, between three and four miles by the time it was lost to view. By this time an hour had passed, for the progress of the fishing boat was slow.

“They’ll be making for Corbast,” said Jonathan, looking up from the map. “They don’t want to hire a car, I suppose, and from Corbast it is only a matter of about four miles to Portree. They’ll get a steamer from there to the mainland, and once they get there we may lose all trace of them, especially if they take to the moors. They got here ahead of us, and they’ll get back ahead of us. What do you want us to do?”

“First, search the house they’ve left,” said Mrs. Bradley. “Secondly, follow them in our boat. Thirdly, put the police on their track. They will have to give some account of themselves if they’re caught, even if they are not concerned in any way with the murders—and we must realize, of course, that they may not be directly involved.”

“I don’t know. They may have murdered the second Loudoun for his money, or because they were not satisfied with what he gave them for

keeping his brother prisoner, or because he cursed them for letting their prisoner escape."

"All that is true," said Mrs. Bradley, "but it seems more likely, on the face of it, that the one Loudoun murdered the other, or that Stewart did it."

"In that case, the dead man on Rannoch may be Ure, but can't be Stewart," said Jonathan.

They walked to the abandoned croft, lifted the latch and went in. Jonathan, who had not expected to find anything startling, was more than surprised to find an old woman seated beside the peat fire which was smouldering in its tin bucket on the hearth in the middle of the room.

Mrs. Bradley seemed unconcerned at sight of her.

"Ah, Morag," she said. "You are a long way from home."

The old woman, who appeared to be unperturbed by their invasion of the house, drew her grey woollen shawl a little closer around her shoulders.

"I am very near home, I am thinking," she replied.

"Oh, nonsense!" said Mrs. Bradley vigorously. "What makes you say a thing like that?"

"I have my thoughts," said Morag. "But will you sit down, then, and take something to eat?" She got up and went to the cupboard. "Some cheese, perhaps, you will like, and an oatcake, yes."

She set the food before them. They did not need it, but scarcely liked to refuse her hospitality. She made tea and told Jonathan to smoke.

"And now," she said, "you have more to say to me."

"A good deal more," said Mrs. Bradley. "We have been most anxious about you. Where did you go on the morning after the murder?"

"The murder?" The effect of this word on the old woman was immediate and striking. "They'll not have dared to kill Master James? Oh, the day, the black day that that should be coming to pass!"

She rocked herself, her grey head buried in her shawl. Mrs. Bradley watched her closely and decided that the grief and the horror were genuine. She waited for a bit, and then said gently:

"I see that you did not anticipate this news. We are trying to find out all that we can, and bring the murderer to justice. Will you not be on our side, and help us?"

But Morag made no reply. When she spoke, it was on another subject.

"The men that came here, and brought me here—who are they?"

“We don’t know. We think they are men who have been in prison. They are, or have been, criminals. We were hoping that you could tell us more about them.”

“I know nothing about them. My Hector sent me a message down to the *clachan,* and there I heard tell that my Alexander was in trouble and was wishing to see me. I left word for my Hector in the *clachan* by Dougal the Post, and went off to Appin, where it was said I would be finding my Alexander. There was a boat at Appin. The men you are speiring after were on board and I went with them, not knowing what way to think, and afraid all the time for Master James that was lying, they were saying, at death’s door.

“They put me ashore at a place of which I had no knowledge, and there they left me. It was night. I had no knowledge, none at all, of where I might be. A good body gave me a bed and food, and told me I was on Skye. I did not tell what had befallen. I was fearing she would not believe me. The next day I would have left, but she would not let me. I am thinking she knew very well I was in trouble. I was with her for so long I was ashamed, and myself a stranger! That was not good. One morning I saw the two men that had brought me away, and my Hector was with them. He called to me and bid me to go from them. He said I should be in great danger if I stayed near him. The two men threatened me. There was no knowing what I should do.

“I was there when my Hector was getting away. I tried to follow, but it was very dark, and I lost him. I went back in the morning to the croft and this little house. It was empty. I have stayed here, thinking that my Hector or the men would come back.”

“Good heavens! Didn’t you tell the police they had threatened you?” demanded Jonathan, who had listened in amazement and unbelief to this dramatic and incredible story. Morag shook her head.

“What are the police to me? I know what I know, and I think what I think, and I was knowing better than anyone else that when they hanged Mr. Malcolm it would not be the end for any of us. And now you say that Master James has been killed? It is nothing to the police. It is nothing now to anyone but me.”

“Mr. Malcolm?” said Mrs. Bradley. “You speak of Malcolm Stewart, who was hanged?”

“It was a long time ago. A very long time ago. I am not learned. I am not able to be telling you the year.”

“And why was he hanged?”

“He killed a man; and it was right he should be doing that same. Does that puzzle you?”

“No,” said Mrs. Bradley, looking at her intently. “It puzzles me less than you think. When we return to Lochaber, is it your wish to go with us? We have our own boat.”

“I am content here.”

“But the croft does not belong to you?”

“Those that left it are content that I should be staying.”

“The croft is the price of your silence, I imagine.”

At this, Morag looked up.

“It is the price of my silence,” she said. “It is the price of my pride. It is the price of my memories. It is the price paid to those that are gone by Morag Stewart.”

“Bats,” said Jonathan concisely, when he and his aunt had left the house. “Poor old girl.”

“Her remarks made pretty good sense,” said Mrs. Bradley. “Considering all things, I think her reticence was the result of what we might call the wisdom of madness.”

“But how much of her story was true?” demanded Ian, when Mrs. Bradley and Jonathan returned to the house. Mrs. Bradley shrugged, and Jonathan replied:

“Not a word of it, I should say.”

“Yet she must be an important witness if a trial is ever held,” persisted Ian. “If what Loudoun told us is true, then she must know far more about the family than anyone. . . .”

“Except Mrs. Forbes,” said Laura. “Did you expect to find Morag here?” she added.

“No,” Mrs. Bradley replied. “I realized, of course, that she had probably left Craigullich on some errand for Mr. Loudoun. It was not very likely that she had been kidnapped whilst Ian and Catherine were there, although it was possible that she left on the Tuesday evening. The question was where she had gone after leaving the house. That question has now, to some extent, been answered. Whether she was brought here in the manner

and for the reason she has described to us, or for some other reason or by some other means, scarcely matters. I should like to confront her with the other old woman, servant to the second Mr. Loudoun, I confess. Later in the day I intend to return to the croft, taking Ian with me, if he has no objection."

"Not the slightest objection," said Ian. "After family prayers every morning in Gaelic, including dirge-like hymn-singing (varied, to my relief, this morning, by the unannounced entrance of the goat), I feel that I can bear anything."

"I want Ian and old Morag to meet again," Mrs. Bradley went on. "To him she may unburden herself in a way she would not to me. If I were sure there would be no danger, Catherine could accompany him. I confess I should welcome her views."

"Well, look here," said Jonathan, "let them both go. I'm all for the equality of the sexes when it comes to getting knocked on the head. I'll crouch behind the wall, if you like, where Menzies hid that night he set Loudoun free, and charge in and help if there's trouble. How are you as a runner, Mrs. Menzies?" he added, turning to Catherine.

"I sprain my ankle when I run," said she, looking across at her husband, "but I'd like to meet old Morag again. I don't believe she's one of the villains of the piece. In fact, it doesn't make any sense if she is. I do think she might be mad, but that scarcely matters, except that her story won't be accepted in court."

"Oh?" said Mrs. Bradley, interested. "Proceed."

"Well," said Catherine, flushing a little as she spoke, "it seems to me that old Morag's story must be partly true. As Mrs. Bradley says, she was sent off by Mr. Loudoun—*our* Mr. Loudoun—to get her out of the way. Well, why should he want to get rid of her? Simply because he knew that his brother, or whatever he is, was coming to Craigullich, and old Morag would have given the game away somehow to Mrs. Bradley when she arrived to give him those psychology tests. All the same, there had to be an old woman there, in case Ian and I had mentioned old Morag to Mrs. Bradley. So the second Mr. Loudoun—Mrs. Bradley's Loudoun—brought with him the old woman from Craig Mellan. That would account for the apparent discrepancy between *our* Loudoun's statement that old Morag had been in the family since they were children, and the other statement made

by the old woman brought by the second Mr. Loudoun, the one who has now been murdered."

"Well, I'm going out," said Jonathan, knocking out his pipe. "Who's coming?"

Laura accompanied him. They had the MacIvers' boat and went fishing. They caught no fish, and were almost swamped by a whale which, chasing a seal into Uig Bay, caused them to make for the shore at a speed which made Laura catch a crab and land on the small of her back in the bottom of the boat. Restored to position and regaining possession of her oars, she continued an argument she had begun about Mendel's theories, identical twins, and the use of blood-tests in deciding parentage, and emerged victorious.

The lad Brian had gone off on a tramp very early in the morning, and had not returned by the time the other parties set out, so that he was not included in the activities of his elders, but had all his adventures, if not alone, at least not in company with his friends and relatives. He had taken plenty of food, was a lad who preferred, on the whole, his own society to that of his aunt and cousin, and caused no one the slightest anxiety until he failed to show up at sunset. Even then it was assumed that he had merely walked too far from Uig to be able to return that night. No one was anxious about him, since, so far as was known, neither Loudoun nor old Morag, let alone the gaol-bird gaolers, had ever so much as set eyes on him, and any family on Skye would give him his supper and a bed.

Chapter Eleven

★

The army of the chequered red!
An t-Arm Breac Dearg!

War cry of the Macquarries

★

Brian had left the house in the certainty—absolute although unexpressed—that he was going to have the best day of the holidays. He had enjoyed himself in his own way whilst his elders were chasing about on their inane and uninteresting pursuits (for he had been told little about the murders, and was at the age when the activities of everybody over twenty and under fourteen were unworthy of serious notice or even of destructive criticism), but he had strongly desired to accompany the party to Skye, and now that he had come there he proposed to employ his time profitably.

He had mapped out huge schemes for exploring the island, and had made some ingenious and ingenuous attempts to find out how long the party intended to remain on Skye. He had not succeeded, since they themselves did not know how long they would remain there, so he had resolved to make the best possible use of whatever time might lie before him.

He set out from Uig and walked northward to the Quiraing. His ambition was to begin his exploration of Skye by walking completely round the coast. The road from Uig northwards did not follow the coast, but a boy out on his own with a rucksack on his shoulders and ten shillings in his pockets was not prepared to quarrel with the vagaries of the island's highways.

At Score Bay the road reached the sea again, and it occurred to Brian that it would be good to bathe. He changed his mind, however, upon

calculating that so far he had covered only about seven miles. He tramped on, enjoying the solitude, across the low country at the northern end of the island, until he reached Kilmaluig, on the eastern side. At Flodigarry he had his lunch, and then, upon the advice of a motor-cyclist whom he met, he returned to Kilmaluig and climbed the height of Sgurr Vourlinn. From the top he could see Trodday and, further off, other islands which he could not identify, but which he supposed to be the Shiants and Lewis.

The wind was very strong on the hilltop, and there was considerable formation of cloud.

By walking southward he found that he could reach his objective, the Quiraing. This strange formation of rocks satisfied all his feeling for romance, and he spent an hour at least in clambering about the hiding-places and in scrambling to the hilltop and looking down upon the extraordinary castles of Nature with their pinnacles and walls, their battlements, and the small, deep mazes which were once the hiding-places for stolen cattle.

On one of the paths, when at last he left the Quiraing, he encountered a dog and then its master, a shepherd. Man and boy passed the time of day, and Brian asked the way back to the coast, as he thought the shepherd would know of a different route from the one by which he had come. He was taken by a rough path and set upon his way, and soon was back on the road and very near to a most enticing beach from which to bathe. He was tired and hot, and the thought of immersing his body in the keen, salt water was delightful. He had stuffed his bathing trunks into his rucksack, and it took him scarcely a minute to fling off shirt, shorts, socks and shoes, pull on his trunks and run down into the sea.

It was a golden afternoon on Skye; one of those perfect days of the middle summer before the later rains begin and the island earns its name of the Misty Isle. There seemed to be no one about. Later in the year there would be cars and tourists, but on that day he had the sea and the beach, as far as he knew, to himself.

He swam and floated, duck-dived, lazed, lay on his back and closed his eyes to the rainbow brilliance of the day, swam fast and then slowly, idled in the water, came out and lay on the sand, lost the heat that comes from exercise and grew warm again in the shadeless heat of the sun, went back to his swimming, and spent the best part of an hour in the mindless enjoyment known only to boys and the beasts, who share, with a common

savagery, a common bliss of holiness and innocence in the pleasures which are natural to both.

At last, not weary of the drifting of a timeless afternoon, but conscious of a journey to be completed before he could get another meal—for, boy-like, he had consumed before midday every morsel of food which the lavish Mrs. MacDonald had packed for him—he came out of the water for the last time and was prepared to put on his clothes.

He had brought no towel, so he peeled off his trunks, wrung water out of them and out of his hair, sauntered over to where he had left his shirt, shorts, and socks—his shoes he had retained and had put off at the water's edge, as the tide was on the turn and was going out—and spread his trunks on the rock behind which he had placed his clothes. He looked for his clothes, but they were gone.

Nonplussed, he tried to believe that he had mistaken the place, but could not convince himself of this, as no similar rock could be seen on that part of the shore. However, he searched with great diligence, his naked body drying in the sun, but had to admit, very soon, that his garments were lost.

He was in a sad quandary, and sat down to think matters out. He knew already enough of the people of the neighbourhood, both on the island and on the mainland opposite, to feel certain that they were the last folk on earth to walk off with clothing, either for the purpose of stealing it or as a practical joke. His first thought was that some of his own party, unknown to him, had also decided to explore the coast roads of the island and had played a trick on him, but he dismissed it almost immediately. He had formed a complete and correct estimate of Ian's sense of humour, and did not believe that silly pranks were essential to its satisfaction. His cousin Jonathan he knew well. As for his aunt, he had heard her, in her mild but skin-pricking manner, to deplore and deride the practical joker as an infantile and often irreclaimable sadist, and never thought of her as even remotely responsible for the *contretemps* which had occurred. There remained Laura, an intelligent and completely intellectual humourist. The loss of the garments was a mystery.

Dismayed and annoyed, he surveyed his available assets: the shoes on his sand-ribbed feet, his rucksack—that had not been taken—and the damp trunks spread upon the rock. The very shortest route back to the croft of the MacDonalds, that by hill-road across the island to Uig Bay, was nine miles

or rather more, and it was not at all to his taste to traverse the passes in nothing but bathing trunks and shoes; neither was he willing to leave the scene of his loss without making some attempt to find his property, or, at least, to discover where it had gone. Unhappily, the afternoon sun was already descending westwards; the shadows cast by the rocks had begun to lengthen; a wash of gold was overspreading the sea, and the sky's gold glow was already being cut by the black silhouettes of the peaks. It was time, it was more than time, for the stoutest-hearted tramp to be on his homeward way.

Brian had to content himself with but one attempt to discover in which direction his clothes had vanished. There was soft sand around the rock beside which he had laid them, and its depth prevented any footprints there might be from having definite shape. Besides, he was not certain that he could distinguish his own tracks from those of another person. Beyond and behind the rock was a grey pool, shallow and clear, formed by a rill which reached the sea sluggishly (if at all) through the sand. It would have been possible, Brian thought, for an enemy or a thief to have waded in the rill and through the pool almost up to the back of the rock, to have seized the clothes from the dry and tumbled sand, and to have sneaked back by the way he had come without leaving any *spoor* which an amateur hunter could detect.

Believing now that no clue existed to the whereabouts of his clothes, he pulled on the clammy woollen trunks, and searched in his rucksack for his map. A previous searcher, it seemed, had been through the rucksack already; the map was not to be found.

Less at a loss without a map (for he had memorized his route before he had started out) than furiously indignant at its loss, Brian was about to follow the course of the rill, which would lead him, he believed, on to the path he meant to follow, when he saw, at a little distance along the beach, a sturdy boy in dark trousers, a fisherman's blue jersey and a Balmoral bonnet. It was young Macquarrie. Brian felt that the meeting of Stanley and Livingstone had taken place over again.

"I say," he said, "I've lost my clothes and things. You wouldn't know anything about it?"

"I would that," replied the boy. "I am after follying the men that have them, and I will be taking you to that place where they have them hid."

"Do you know the chaps?"

"I am not knowing who they are, but I am thinking they are not over-anxious to meet folks. They have a look of hiding themselves away. They will be the men that have Mrs. MacShuffie's wee croft at the top of the cliff. I have follied them most over the island."

"I don't know them. The trouble is, I ought to be on my way back. And what are you doing here, anyway? We left you at Ballachulish."

"My mother's sister is living in the *clachan* by Stenscholl." He pointed southward of where they were standing. "I was along by here when I was seeing a man. He was walking in the wee burn, and another with him. But the first one walked on ahead and the other was hiding in the heather. The first one had a long stick and he reached from the *lochan* for your clothes and hooked them away. Then he was putting them under his arm and running, and the other got up like an old bull, and I can show you the way they took beyond the burn, and where they were hiding the clothes and the way they were cursing. I was hearing at my father's that ye were for Uig. I follied ye all day."

"Come on," said Brian, spurred by the lust for battle. "Tell me about it afterwards. We'll lose these fellows if we don't get a move on now."

"Not too fast," said Macquarrie. "We should go carefully, I am thinking. I would not be wishing to have them murder us."

"Murder us?" said Brian, staring. "What do you mean by that?"

"Man, never mind what I am meaning. But be keeping down the head of you, and be trusting me to know these parts much better than you can be knowing them. I have stayed with my mother's sister, times, before. I could be showing you where the kelpie keeps, and . . ."

"Oh, all right. Go ahead."

The boys crept forward, following the course of the rill. Around them rolled the treeless moors of the island. Before them rose the hills which Brian would need to cross to get back home. To his relief, the trail followed by young Macquarrie soon joined what, from memory of the map, he believed to be his homeward track. They climbed a steep cliff, skirted a small *clachan,* passed some scattered crofts, and then began to ascend a gradual inclination by a rough path which bordered a deep drop to a valley.

"How far ahead do you think they are?" asked Brian.

"I do not know that. This is the road they were follying."

The road, on to which they diverged at a wide angle at the end of twenty minutes' hard walking, ran across fairly high ground between hills.

Attempting to keep up with his stocky companion, Brian began to realize how very tired he was. The swim in the bay had been refreshing, but had left him, after the long tramp which had lasted from early morning until the middle of the afternoon, with slack and weary muscles, and a languorous body which did not approve of further strenuous exercise.

He had little hope or expectation that he and Macquarrie would catch up with the thieves, and his one desire now was to get home. Mist was in the dips and hollows of the hills, and, with the declining sun, the temperature had dropped. His bathing trunks were not yet dry, and although the rate at which the boys were making progress kept him warm, he was aware of a clinging coldness about his loins which was not at all comfortable.

The road was met occasionally by sheep paths, and suddenly Macquarrie plunged into one of these. To Brian it seemed to be off the direct route, a narrow track of an ancient hill-pass which had been in existence long before the making of the roads.

The pass chosen led by the side of a hill-loch, deep and dark. About it rose the cliffs of the hill, and the whole effect was gloomy with grandeur and uncomfortable with the approach of evening. Brian was not, in some ways, a particularly imaginative lad, and he was not usually unduly influenced by his surroundings; but he felt first a vague and then an acute sense of depression amounting almost to fear, in the face of the loneliness of nature and the almost complete wiping-out of colour in favour of stark, uncompromising line. Even the heather looked dead in the fading light, and the rowans which grew here and there on the cliff-sides gave the effect of men changed suddenly into trees at the approach of a human being. He was thankful for the sturdy companionship of Macquarrie, who strained onward like a hound following a scent.

On a cairn whose age was unknown, the boys leaned to rest. Brian's thin, strong shanks were aching with weariness, his feet felt as though they would drop from the ends of his legs, and, his food all devoured long since, he was very hungry—as hungry as, probably, only a boy can be.

"I say," said he to his companion, "I'm frightfully hungry. Is it much further, do you think?"

By way of answer, Macquarrie took hold of his arm and pointed forward and downward at the hill-slope. Below them, in a tiny corrie, could

be seen two men. Macquarrie, who had deer-stalker's eyes, whispered excitedly:

"They are the ones that have your clothes. Yon big man, him that has the stick, he was taking them. Didn't I see him?"

This news and the sight of the men caused Brian to forget his hunger, cold, and tiredness in an instant. The two lads sank behind a small boulder which sufficiently hid their bodies, and took stock of the men and the situation. Now that the thieves were at hand, Brian could not see for the moment what was best to be done. It would be madness to leap down upon the men and demand his property. Even with Macquarrie as eyewitness to the stealing, he was not, he felt, in a position to accuse the men of having taken his clothes, nor could he decide, now that he saw the robbers, what could have induced them to seize such paltry spoil as a pair of well-worn shorts and a shirt neither handsome nor new. There was his map, but it was the ordinary Ordnance map on a scale of a mile to an inch, such as could be purchased in any large town, and he could not believe that it was the object of their pilferings. In fact, for a minute or two, he was more inclined to suspect his companion of having played a trick on him than the men of having his garments and map in their possession.

"Are you sure they're the chaps?" he asked softly. Macquarrie turned candid blue-grey eyes upon him and answered emphatically:

"Aye. That's them that have them."

"Then how do we get them back?" To adventure his almost naked body within easy reach of a thick long stick seemed scarcely the ripest strategy.

"We'll folly them," said Macquarrie, beginning to crawl down the slope. There followed a deer-stalking enterprise of the most exciting kind. There being nothing of particular value by this time in his rucksack, Brian discarded it. Macquarrie had taken off his sweater of blue yarn and had given it to his grateful comrade, revealing himself in a dark grey flannel shirt. He very soon dropped to the ground. Brian, greatly comforted by the prickly warmth of the guernsey which covered him half-way to the knees, followed the example of his agile companion, and soon both boys were in close hiding to windward of the men and in a position to overhear their conversation.

The evening was now drawing in. The wind, which had been rising since the boys had left the coast, blew strongly enough to keep the mist at

bay except in the sheltered hollows. The men, who wore homespun suits and were bareheaded, seemed to be feeling the cold, for one drew the collar of his coat close round his throat and the other, buttoning his jacket, loudly cursed the wind.

"Time he showed up," said the first. Brian thought that they were referring to him, and wondered whether he had fallen into a trap, but it was soon clear that some other was meant, for the second man, with a grunt, said that he supposed "his load would hold him up a bit, as you couldn't dot and carry one with any sense up these hills."

Secure in the knowledge that the strong wind was blowing from the direction of the men towards himself, so that his voice would not easily be heard, Macquarrie murmured to Brian:

"You'll be minding the dream of the man of the Midianites?"

As this question was double-Dutch to a lad brought up according to the rites and ceremonies of the Church of England, Brian merely looked bewildered. His companion picked up a small sharp piece of rock and lobbed it with swift skill so that it fell exactly between the men. Although it did not produce quite the debacle feared by the man of Midian—possibly because it had not started life as a cake of barley bread—the sudden appearance of the stone had a marked effect. Both men leapt back, and then gazed up at the hairpin bend of the road. Seeing nothing which could account for the flight of the stone, they then gazed at one another, and the one who had anticipated that their lame companion could not follow the hill-road without difficulty, swore crudely and then added, "This must be him. What's his game? He's a funny devil, he is!"

As he said the last word, another stone, flicked with apparent negligence but deadly aim by Macquarrie, caught him on the tip of his ear. He gave a grunting squeal of agony, and, turning, began to climb a small bluff up on to the road. Macquarrie put his hand on the back of Brian's head, and pushed his face into the heather. Acting on the hint, Brian kept low. He lost sight of the man, who was now on the road, but he could hear him calling down to his companion that he could see nobody and was going as far as the bend. At this Macquarrie touched Brian and began to worm his way along a narrow track in the heather.

Brian followed, as quietly and unobtrusively as he could; but found himself hopelessly outclassed by the Highland boy, who travelled like a snake among the heather and made not a rustle. Swiftly he descended a long

slope in a longer slant, and worked round to the side of the man who was left alone. Beside the man was a small Gladstone bag. From behind the man's left shoulder, Macquarrie raised his hand to signal Brian to stop. Brian went to ground at once, the harsh stalks of the heather pricking his bare shins. His face was almost buried, but gradually he raised his head to see what Macquarrie was doing. He saw the lad stretch out a long arm and begin drawing the bag towards him.

In amusement and excitement, Brian watched, keeping a thought all the time for the man on the road, who, at any instant, might return. The bag seemed to glide towards Macquarrie. In a moment it had disappeared. Brian, still obedient, lay where he was and waited. In a short time, from higher up the hill, a stone fell about six yards in front of the man. The man started forward towards it, and Macquarrie, coming up behind Brian, muttered:

"I have it! Now to get you away before they are finding it gone."

He put the Gladstone bag beside Brian, and glided off again. Very soon he was back. The second man had begun to scramble up the bluff towards his comrade.

"Now," muttered Macquarrie. "After me, and I'll set you upon your road. Be moving fast."

Brian followed his guide. They took a slant back to pick up the rucksack, which Macquarrie refused to leave behind, and then made a long cast over the rough and heathery hill beyond the point on the road to which the first man had climbed.

"Now," said Macquarrie, "be seeing whether your clothes are in the bag." Brian, now sticky with sweat, opened the bag, whose fasteners snapped with a loud clicking sound which made him certain the men would hear it, and discovered his shirt and shorts. He pulled off Alan's sweater, put his clothes on over his trunks, slipped his feet from his shoes and put on his new-found socks, put the shoes on again, tightened the laces, and handed over sweater and bag.

"I will be seeing they have their bag," said Macquarrie. "Then I must be away. I will be missed, and they searching the hills for me."

"Well, look here, thanks most awfully," Brian began; but the Highland boy cut him short.

"They're back, and are after finding out the wee bag is gone," he muttered. "I will be making them think the *each uisge* is after eating it.

Keep you straight on up the road, and you'll be coming into Uig in time for your supper."

The next moment he was gone, having tossed out the map which was still in the bottom of the bag. Brian picked it up, pushed it into the rucksack which they had retrieved from the hillside, and, hearing the men's angry voices close at hand, slipped rapidly away in the direction which Macquarrie indicated; but, not being confident in the powers of his companion to tease the men without getting himself into danger, and preferring to stay and take a share in the fun, he lay in the heather and listened. The last thing he wanted was to be out after dark on the hills, but he would not be outdone by any boy of his age, and particularly not by one who had come so sturdily to his rescue.

Macquarrie wriggled back to where he lay.

"They are missing the sight of the wee bag," he muttered, amused. "Why would you not be going on your way?"

"Rather stay here," murmured Brian. "Can't make out why they wanted my clothes. Can you?"

"I cannot. Maybe we will find out." He writhed away again. Brian, realizing that on a bare hillside he would find no better cover than where he was, and having no idea of what Macquarrie was proposing to do, lay still, and kept his ears alert for sounds.

For a quarter of an hour he lay there. He heard nothing of the men or of his companion. Then there were oaths and shouts, and the next moment Macquarrie was back at his side.

"Run for it, man," he said earnestly. "I've pitched their wee bag down the hill, and they are like hares after it. Let you be getting away home. I'll be seeing you the morn's morn in Uig."

He rose, looked about him, and then set off at a trot in the direction from which he had come. Brian needed no further counsel. He, too, rose to his feet. He could see the men as they made laborious progress, now, on the steep side of the hill. He took the opposite direction from that in which Macquarrie had disappeared, and also broke into a trot. The track was rough but not treacherous, and he made quite good going as, dropping at times into a walk, navigating hairpin bends and sudden risings and dips in the path, picking up his heels again when he could, and rejoicing in the recapture of his property and the warmth and security of his clothes, he tried to beat the approaching darkness in the race for home.

He saw no more of the men, but, as he hastened, forcing his weary muscles to strenuous efforts, he could not keep his mind from dwelling upon his small but mysterious adventure. No explanation of their conduct occurred to him, and he obtained none until he left the hill-road from Stenscholl and rejoined the narrow road from Uig which he had followed on his outward trip. The explanation, when he had it, was obscure enough to cause him the wildest surmises; in fact, from his point of view, it was not, at first, an explanation at all, but a deepening of the mystery.

There was a car drawn up at the roadside. It was dark by this time, and all he could see was the rear light marking its width. He skirted the car, and suddenly a torch was flashed in his face. He started back, but was gripped from behind and pinioned. He was a lithe and sturdy youngster, and, although the men had taken him by surprise, he put up a plucky fight before they had him gagged and tied and had flung him on to the back seat of the car.

It was only two hours later that the news came to Ian, lying on a wall-bed in the room in which the fish-scented son of the house was asleep on a mattress in the corner, that a man and a boy were below and would like to see him.

These tidings were brought by a night-shirted Mr. MacIver whose red beard and bright blue eyes betrayed his Norse ancestry, but whose speech and thought were pure Gaelic. English he spoke as a foreign language, not fluently but with a dignified correctness and great charm.

“There are Mr. MacIain and his nephew Alan Macquarrie will be below to be having speech with you. Very sorry I am you should be troubled and you in your warm bed. Is it your pleasure I shall be asking them to wait upon you, yes?”

“Sure,” said Ian, getting up at once and pulling on trousers and a coat. “Lead the way. I hope no one is taken ill at Mr. MacDonald’s?”

“Indeed, I am thinking not,” said Mr. MacIver, watching with great interest whilst Ian tightened the straps at the sides of his grey flannel trousers. “For, had it been someone was sick at Mr. MacDonald’s house, it would be he would be seeking you out.”

He led the way to the family living-room and introduced Mr. MacIain. Accompanying his uncle was the young Macquarrie who had followed Brian to the beach and had helped him recover his clothes.

“There will be no time to lose,” said Mr. MacIain, a tall, grave man with an ascetic but gentle face. “My sister’s son is after telling me you have a young lad in your party was out on the hills to-day.”

“My cousin, Brian Lestrange, a boy of thirteen.”

“Well, well!” He turned to his nephew. “Tell your story, laddie, tell your story. You’re certain it is the truth, now?”

“Aye,” said Macquarrie sturdily. He then told of the adventure the two boys had had together, and then added to it the fact that, fast as he had returned to his aunt’s house that evening, the two men had chased him all the way, and, he had believed at first, had intended to catch him. He would have outdistanced them easily but for a nail that worked up out of his shoe. He had gone barefoot for a time, and, even so, would have outdistanced the men, but for a sharp stone which crippled him for a time and slowed him down.

It was apparent, however, that the men were not thinking of him, for they passed him just at the end of the hill-road and went to the croft of a man called James Spean and, from behind his turf-heap, drove a car on to the road. They had taken the northerly road which Brian had travelled in the morning, only they had travelled it in the opposite direction, and it occurred to the quick-witted boy that they might be going to cut Brian off at Uig and punish him for the dance they had been led and the loss of the stolen property.

“And but for the laddie to have been telling me about the death of a man on Rannoch, I would not have been listening to him, but I minded me that he has never been a bad laddie and the other laddie might have been in some trouble from them. Well, even then I might have been doing nothing about it at all, but I had stepped out on to the road, as is my habit before I go to my bed, when I was seeing a car going by, and it travelling southward towards Portree, and so fast, at that, I could not be seeing the number. Then it came to me that there had been murder done near Loch Rannoch, and it came to me that the laddie was speaking the truth, and I was thinking I should maybe be stepping across the hill and acquainting you with what he is after saying.”

“Thanks very much,” said Ian. “My people at MacDonald’s had better know. It’s most likely the boy has been kidnapped. Towards Portree, you say? It was very good indeed of you to come.”

“No trouble it is to me, at all, at all, and you to be speaking so kindly,” said Mr. Maclain.

Chapter Twelve

★

Gainsay who dare!
Dh' aindeoin co theireadh e!

War cry of the MacDonalds of Clanranald

★

Roused to action by the news brought by Mr. MacIain and his nephew, Mrs. Bradley's party separated into two sections. She and Jonathan roused Mr. MacDonald's cousin Angus MacIver and hired his car (bought, some six years previously, for the use and abuse of summer tourists) to go at once to Portree. Ian and Laura backed the *Kerisaig* out of her moorings and took her with all speed back to Ballachulish.

Brian himself, in the meantime, cramped, uncomfortable, and in pain from the roughness and force with which he had been bound and gagged, was trying to get his wits to work in order to effect his escape.

He could see nothing out of the windows, for the blinds were drawn and, in any case, he was helpless. He could not tell how fast the car was travelling, but deduced, from the way it swayed and swung, that the speed must be considerable.

One comfort he had; he was alone. Both men were seated in front. He had been placed along the back seat with a couple of suitcases in front so that he should not be jolted on to the floor. As it was pitch dark, he minded not being able to look out of the window much less than he would have minded it by daylight.

The car made a comparatively short journey and then pulled up. The men got down and lifted the boy on to the roadside.

"This should do," said one. "Take his legs and bring him over here. This is a quiet part, but you never know." The other, obeying, grunted, and

said that he supposed not. “Then you’d better stay and keep your eye on him,” continued the first, “while I run the car over the ferry.” The second demurred, but was soon overruled by the first, who added grimly, “All right, if you want a bullet through your guts. *He* is as jealous as a stoat, and you ought to know it. Besides, you’re in bad already, so you’d better do what he says.”

The car, whose lights had been switched off as soon as it had stopped, was now driven away, and the man left with Brian cut him free.

“Now, young ’un,” he said, in not unkindly tones, “behave yourself and you’re safe; but try any tricks and I’ll have to cut your throat. Plenty of water hereabouts to dump your dead body in, you know.”

Brian said nothing, and the man then asked him whether he had lost his tongue.

“No,” said the boy, “but what have I done to be kidnapped?”

“Nothing, sonny. It’s nothing to do with you. You’re what we call a pawn. Ever played chess?”

“A bit. We’ve got a club at school.”

“Have you now? And where might your school be, I wonder?”

“In the south of England, not far from Dartmoor. I daresay you know it.”

“Less of your lip,” said the man, turning suddenly ill-tempered, “else I’ll soon have that gag back! You keep a civil tongue in your head, do you hear!”

“Sorry. No offence,” said Brian. “Why shouldn’t I mention Dartmoor? You weren’t ever in prison there, were you?”

The man did not answer.

“If we’re not going to talk, do you mind if I go to sleep?” asked Brian. He could feel that they were seated on coarse, long grass, and guessed the presence of water. He lay down and began to rub his wrists and ankles, where the thick string used by the men to tie him up had cut into and chafed the skin. He also tenderly touched his mouth, which felt bruised and stiff from the gag. He did not know what time he had, for the first man might be gone all night or might return in a quarter of an hour, for all he knew. As he gently massaged the limbs and restored their circulation he contrived to edge himself slightly further from his captor.

“Here, you keep still,” said the man, “or you might roll into the sea.”

Brian kept still on the instant. He did not believe that they were very near the sea. There was not a sound to be heard, neither was there the tang of sea-salt in the wind. He deduced that they were on a grassy knoll above a loch, and worked out, from this, a boyish plan of escape which a grown person might not have risked. He suddenly flung himself sideways and began to roll over and over. The man made a grab in the dark, but missed and went plunging forward on hands and knees. Brian rolled faster. He was on the slope he had hoped for and expected. It was fairly steep, but not worse than he had anticipated. He hoped he would not roll on to boulders, but that, from his point of view, was the only danger.

There were no boulders. There was nothing but the shallow, grassy waters of a loch, and he splashed in, shouted aloud as though he were in terror, splayed water all around him as though he were trying to gain the bank and escape the water, but all the time plunged deeper and deeper in.

He could hear the man shouting, and then he could see the spotlight of a torch. The water suddenly deepened. Whether he had reached a stretch in which he could swim, or whether he had only found a deep hole, he could not immediately tell, but he chanced it and swam, and then found he could keep on swimming.

It occurred to him then that he had not the slightest idea of how far it was across the loch. It might be several miles and it might be a hundred yards or even less. He could not see a thing, and there was nothing to do but to swim on and trust in Providence.

The gods of daring, heedless youth looked after him. He had swum not more than a couple of hundred yards, and could still hear the shouts of the man, when his arms, reaching out and dipping deep, encountered grass again. In a couple of seconds he was in the muddy shallows, and was half-floating, half-crawling forwards whilst the depth of the water decreased at last to inches.

The ooze was soft and slimy. His fear, at this point, was of mud into which he would sink. But his luck still held. His knees sank in to a depth of seven or eight inches, but he could manage to drag himself forward, although he wondered whether the man could hear the squelching sound that he made.

Then another thought came. It was more than probable that his captor, guessing what had happened, and knowing the place, had only to walk round the margin of the loch to overtake him.

Brian lay where he was, and listened. The man was calling him—not by name, of course, but by the soubriquet of "Say, kid!"

Brian could hear the sound of this becoming fainter, and thanked his stars that the man, faced by alternatives, had elected to walk the wrong way round the loch.

The boy did not waste time. He scrambled forward, not caring now whether the man heard him or not, got clear of the water and marginal mud and felt the ground steeply rising. Ahead of him was a black mass, distinguishable against the dark sky. He made for it. The hills were cleft by corries, some large, some small. It would be odd, and hard, he thought, if, once at large on a hillside, he could not outwit the two men.

At Portree there was not the slightest trace. Mrs. Bradley philosophically, and Jonathan blasphemously, parked the car and themselves until morning. Fortunately the hotel was well accustomed to idiotic guests who got lost, rash and ill-advised guests who left it too late to continue their journey elsewhere, and unfortunate guests who had been caught by the weather or other Act of God, and so had to put up for the night at places they had expected to by-pass or go through on their way to their own hotel or the mainland, and expressed no surprise at the invasion.

No surprise was expressed, either, and probably little was felt, when Jonathan, having arranged that the two of them should be accommodated, also demanded that they should be called at not later than five on the following morning.

The *Kerisaig* churned out from Uig Bay and crossed Loch Snizort, going north of the Ascrib Islands and out past Vaternish Point. Ian allowed the headland about a mile of leeway, and then turned the cruiser south towards Loch Dunvegan. The *Kerisaig* passed Ardmore Point on the north shore of Loch Dunvegan and then ran clean across the outer limit of the loch to Dunvegan Head.

The seas were rough and high, and a stiffish breeze was blowing. It was not a night on which Ian would have chosen to go for a cruise, and he had done his best to get Laura to accompany Mrs. Bradley and Jonathan in the car. His sister, however, had been firm, for she knew very well that in default of herself as crew he would have had to take Jonathan, and that would have been unfair, she thought, to Mrs. Bradley. Besides, she loved the cruiser, and had spent some happy holidays on board the sturdy little

cutter. She cared neither for wind, rain, nor sea, and exulted in being soaked through and tossed about.

Daylight soon came. Ian put out the navigation lights and crammed on speed. They ran past the little Loch Pooltiel, came round another headland, passed, on a south-east slant, the islanded, broken Loch Bracadale and then kept south past Rudha nan Clach and MacFarlane's Rock on about the hundred-fathom line marked on Ian's charts.

At last they made Cuillin Sound, past Loch Brittle and the island of Soay, and, leaving the coast entirely, made straight for the Sound of Sleat across rainbow mountains of billows. The day was fine, though not warm, and the bucketing seas streamed into the tiny cockpit in cascades of dirty green as different from the spectrum iridescence of the spray as the colours of the flying-fish laid on deck is different from its colours as it leaps from the white and blue wave.

From Point of Sleat they came more directly south, ran down past Eigg and Muck, past Ardnamurchan Point, which began to be an old friend, and into the Sound of Mull. Ian made straight for Oban and went to the police to report upon the kidnapping. It had happened, he presumed, well out of Cameron's district, but as the men might be headed, with the boy, towards Lochaber or even Appin, the inspector seemed a very good person to whom to confide their anxieties. He was interested, warmly indignant, and full of polite but very sincere-sounding promises. Somewhat comforted, they ran the *Kerisaig* northwards to Ballachulish, and returned once more to the hotel.

Meanwhile, at Portree a council of war had been held, and it had been decided that Jonathan should remain on Skye and scour it, assisted by the authorities and anybody else who would serve, whilst Mrs. Bradley returned to the mainland and followed her own inclination, which was to pick the trail up again near Appin. She argued that the kidnapping was to put a spoke in the activities of herself and her party, since the boy himself could scarcely be reckoned a danger to anyone's plans. Either she or Laura —so she assumed—must have stumbled on something vital. She could not decide what it was, and therefore was inclined to think that it must be Laura who had collected this special knowledge, and not herself.

She carefully reviewed, as she travelled (by steamer and then by motor-coach south again), the special information which Laura had amassed. The most interesting piece seemed to be the story told by the ex-

domestic servant Janet Forbes and the so-far-unexplained activities of the pseudo-artist-bagman. She decided to concentrate on these two persons and to review in detail what they had had to tell. If her utter neglect of her very young nephew seemed callous, it had to be allowed that there were resourceful, intelligent people already devoted to his interests. She did not think she could offer them very much help, and she had deduced that the boy was not in danger.

She felt sure that the kidnapping was a plot to keep her and her party on Skye and away from Craigullich, and felt that her efforts would be far more usefully employed in finding out the hub of the mystery surrounding the Loudouns, Stewart, and the so-far anonymous bagman than in helping to search for her nephew.

Wet through and cold, Brian lay out on the hill. He had climbed, trusting only to luck that no accident happened, up and away from the grassy loch beside which the men had placed him, and had gained what seemed to him an eminence at least three hundred feet above the water. In fact, he had climbed up less than a quarter of that distance, but he felt completely safe and was full of self-congratulation in that he had escaped and was free once more.

He lay sprawled in his wet clothes until dawn, and then, with them clammy and clinging, and feeling as though he were cased in snow, he took stock of himself and his position. The men had taken his rucksack and emptied his pockets. He had no map, no money, nor any kind of property except the clothes he was wearing. He found himself in country which was vaguely familiar, although he knew he had never seen it before. He had seen photographs of it, however, and recognized the peculiar surroundings of the Storr Rock.

He could see below him the still and grassy waters of the loch out of which he had crawled after his swim. It was like the cold, hard silver of an unsheathed sword in the cold, hard light of the dawn before the sunrise. He must have swum across from a low peninsula (which dipped two long quiet capes to the water's edge), to the rising banks of the rock itself which now towered above him with its greatest serrated mass clean cut as a Spanish *sierra* against the faint morning sky.

The boy climbed higher, and then, from a vantage point, looked down to the water and beyond it. There was no sign of his captors; no sign of the

car; yet he knew he had not heard the latter driven away. He rested, and then climbed on. The rock was two thousand three hundred feet at its highest point, but he did not make for this. With the instinct of boyhood he made a climber's circuit and crossed the ridge at about a thousand feet. Once on the further side he felt safe, and rested again. He could see the sea, and decided to make for the coast. With good heart, strong limbs and a little luck he could make his way back to the MacDonalds. He decided upon the west coast route, and worked down the longer, shallower side of the ridge, coming on to the Carbost road not far from Hinnisdal Bridge. From here the road ran directly north to Uig.

Mrs. Bradley went first to Janet Forbes, and Janet Forbes received Mrs. Bradley with her usual kindness and with less than her usual acerbity. Mrs. Bradley looked 'a respectable body'—this in spite of a certain eccentricity of dress and deportment—and, in Janet's view, was a person who belonged to a generation respected, indulged, and obeyed by the genus to which she herself belonged.

She spoke warmly of Laura, and the conversation passed easily from this to the house of Craigullich and its glen. The story which emerged in response to Mrs. Bradley's questions did not differ from that told to Laura, and not one extra fact emerged which might afford any further explanation of the mystery of the two deaths. Mrs. Bradley, now primarily interested in the second of the deaths, that of the Loudoun she had met at Craigullich, pressed Janet again as to the possibility that there had been born twin boys to Lorna Loudoun—then still Lorna Stewart. The old servant admitted the possibility, but added that she had never heard of it, and had never seen any Loudoun at Craigullich. But she had left before Lorna married again and brought her new husband 'to a place where he wisna wanted, and where none had ony guid word to say to him,' and so could provide no positive information.

Mrs. Bradley, who had formed various theories which would account for the first murder, was now visited by a startling and, at first sight, unlikely one to account for the second. It was natural, she supposed, that if the murdered man on Rannoch were the legal owner of Glen Ullich and its house, those he would dispossess if he pressed his claim should wish him out of the way. Expressed arithmetically, that theory merely amounted to two minus one leaves one; one to enjoy the fruits of premeditated, sordid,

mercenary crime. Murder—even mass murder—had been committed more often that not for a similar reason. She reviewed the cases of George Joseph Smith, Burke and Hare, and the Frenchman Jean-Baptiste Troppmann.

But, if this were the reason for the death of Ure (supposing Ure to be Stewart) there seemed to be two theories which could account for the death of Loudoun. One was that his twin (and it remained to be proved that he had a twin) had eliminated him in order to claim the property himself; the other, which would fit in better (psychologically speaking) with the family history as she knew it, was that the second murder was an act of revenge for the first. The difficulty here, however, was to find a likely avenger. There seemed to be no one, with the possible exception of the artist-bagman, and he had represented himself merely as Stewart's friend.

"What was Mr. Stewart like?" she demanded. "The son, not the man who was hanged?"

"And a black day that was," said Janet, "Och, aye. I shall not forget it. And his murderer to be marrying on young Mrs. Stewart so soon!"

"His murderer?" But Mrs. Bradley realized that Janet had avoided answering the question.

"What else? Gin Roderick Loudoun had not led her into that wickedness, what way would they have hanged Mr. Stewart for shooting his brother? Roderick Loudoun murdered him as though he had killed him wi' his own hands, the more disgrace on him that he didna! It was he told the police that Mr. Stewart shot his brother dead, glad though he was to see him put out of the way, and him wishing to marry on Mrs. Stewart all the time! I would be willing to believe it was he that told Mr. Stewart his brother had taken Mrs. Stewart to England. I would say he killed them both, his brother and Mr. Stewart too! Aye, and another with them!"

This statement was not open to discussion, Mrs. Bradley felt; neither did she think that further questioning of Janet could elicit information of value, since the old servant had probably left the realm of fact for the (to her) more satisfactory and romantic one of fancy. Her fancies might be nearer the truth than the facts were, but, since they were incapable of proof, they were dangerous and might be misleading. It was curious, however, that Janet had formed these theories. She did not look the kind of woman to nurse such whimsical ideas as that one brother should set out to have another brother murdered by a righteously angry and disillusioned husband in order that he himself, in his turn, could have the husband hanged and so

take the wife for himself. Mrs. Bradley wished she could see a portrait of Lorna Stewart. She asked what Lorna looked like, and received the answer that she was ‘a wee, sma’ bit of a thing, much like many others that could be told of.’

The fact remained, however, that she had steeped two families in murder and horrid mystery, and Mrs. Bradley was anxious to know more of her.

It was odd, too, that in both generations of these thieves and murderers, two Loudoun brothers had been involved. The case had the over-peopled aspect of a minor Elizabethan play.

As she returned to Ballachulish she found that Janet Forbes’ fantastic theories had bolstered and buttressed her own new and startling idea. She shied away from this idea at first; it was melodramatic, and she distrusted melodrama although she knew it was sometimes true to life. She returned to it again, however, because, if it could be proved to be a fact, all the unaccountable aspects of the case would shake down to the level of their proper proportions and significance, and then both murders could be seen in the perspective of commonsense and logic.

To test this new idea—more from the point of view of getting it out of her head than for other reason—it was essential that she should encounter Laura’s bagman. Her immediate problem was to find out how to get in touch with him.

She knew that it would not be of any use to advertise. He knew far too much about the dead man on Rannoch Moor to be willing to come forward to be questioned. If he had not gone to the police with his special knowledge, it was most unlikely that he would come to her. If he were to be met with, it must be an unofficial and an apparently casual meeting. She set her wits to work to see how it could be accomplished.

There remained the problem of the reason—although commonsense still told her that this could be only the minor one of distracting the attention of herself and her party from the business in hand—for the kidnapping of her nephew Brian on Skye, and the other problem of whom Janet Forbes could have meant by ‘another with them.’

At the hotel she found Ian and Laura, who had just left the *Kerisaig* at moorings. They demanded news. She had none. They asked for orders. She suggested that Ian should accompany her to Craigullich, now in possession

of the police, to find out whether anything more had come out with reference to the Loudouns.

Laura, who presented herself as a participator in this excursion, was bidden to find the bagman, and, when she had contrived to do this, to telegraph at once to Ballachulish.

This kind of mission was not only within Laura's scope but much to her liking. Catherine volunteered to accompany her. Deborah, who would also have enjoyed the excursion, decided that someone ought to remain at the hotel in case news of Brian came from Skye and in case Laura's quest proved almost immediately fruitful. Mrs. Bradley vetoed her staying, however. She had acquainted the management with the circumstances, and felt sure that they could be trusted to do all that would be required in the event of Brian's turning up or news of him being received whilst his friends were out of the hotel.

"In any case," she said to Deborah, "you can't sit night and day at the telephone, child. It isn't necessary. I have no very great anxiety for Brian. He is an intelligent boy, and has probably slipped through their fingers long before this. If he has, he will go back to the MacDonalds, and they will send word at once. Go with the others, and enjoy yourself."

Deborah, who still suffered (a legacy from her brief but crowded time as a schoolmistress and training college lecturer) from an over-developed sense of responsibility, could not undertake to feel any enjoyment whatever until the young boy was found and was known to be safe and unhurt, but she felt the need for a change, and went with the others obediently.

Jonathan, alone in Portree, had remained in touch with the police for the whole of the morning, and then received word that he was wanted at once by the MacDonalds. There was no reason given for this appeal, so, worried and not too hopeful, he drove back through Kensaley to Uig and discovered that Brian had managed to work his way out of the clutches of the kidnappers. He had been put to bed at once by Mrs. MacDonald, and had made no objection to this, as he was tired out and needed nothing so much as some sleep.

"He is after eating his breakfast and his dinner in one," said Mrs. MacDonald proudly, "and he is lying down the now. My sorrow!—but he was the hungry one, that one! And the weary! But I was not to be telling any of you that he was safe; not that at all, indeed! It was to be kept a great secret, yes, and himself to be telling you all about it when he would! Well,

well! Laddies are all fey! Come you and see the sleep of him, so pretty it is! I am minding on Dougal when he was three years old!"

So Jonathan seated himself on a hard chair near the bed, and waited for his cousin to wake. Meanwhile Mrs. MacDonald had washed and dried his clothes and was making them look like new with her pressing and ironing.

Brian woke up at seven in the evening, became full of plans at once, and demanded to be told why they had not roused him sooner.

"Sooner is it?" asked Mrs. MacDonald. "Well, well! And you to be lying for all the world—my sorrow!—as though you were dead and in heaven!"

"Yes, but they may have escaped us!" Brian exclaimed. "I must have Mr. MacDonald and you, Jon, to tackle the fellows, and the police as well, if you like, but let's be quick."

"This is a family matter," said Jonathan smiling. "I haven't had a decent scrap in years. Do they carry guns?"

"I didn't see any. I shouldn't think they'd dare, but you never know. They're gaol-birds, both of them, and they're expecting a third chap to join them. The one, I suppose, who didn't show up when they stole my clothes and we got them back, up on the hills."

"Where do I find these fellows?"

"You're to let me come, too."

"You've done your share. Where are they?"

"I shan't tell you unless you take me with you."

"All right, then. Let's go and find MacDonald, and see if he'll go along as well."

"Not to hold me while you do the fighting."

"Oh, well, you'd better tell the police and have done with it, perhaps."

"Don't be a fool. We don't want to get it all mixed up, and go and ruin the holiday by having to give evidence or something. Play square, and I'll tell you everything I know."

"All right, then, you young devil."

"I left them by the loch at the foot of the Storr Rock. I'm sure they hadn't gone when I left, although they may be far enough now. I wish we had that fellow Menzies, Laura's brother. I'll bet he'd be useful in a scrap. I don't want Mr. MacDonald to get in trouble. Can't you and I go alone?"

"We might tackle two, but suppose they've been joined by their leader?"

"Oh, yes, they did say something of the sort. All right, then. Ask him to come."

"Not until the morning," said Jonathan.

But Mr. MacDonald had forestalled them. He had called out his friends as to a war and, as soon as it was light, Jonathan found himself at the head of a little posse of the younger men of the *clachan* just south of Uig, the crofters among whom they were staying, among them being Malcolm MacIver and a couple of brothers named MacNeill, and a crofter called Flanagan, whose family had been settled near Uig Bay for three or four generations and had come originally from Ireland.

"But they'll just scare the fellows off, and we'll never get them!" said Brian in great dismay. So, this being explained to the crofters, a carload, consisting of Jonathan, who drove, Brian, young MacIver, and the two MacNeills, drove off in advance of the others, after giving them the closest directions.

By the time they got to the Storr Rock, however, which they reached from the shores of Loch Leathan, there was no sign of the men at the spot where Brian had left them. The tracks of their car, however, were plain to see. Jonathan left his own car, with young MacIver to guard it and watch the road, as near to the Rock as he could, which was between the Old Man of Storr and Bearnarig Bay, and the four who were left began to track the car-marks left by the men.

They soon discovered the car, but still found no sign of the men. It was clear that, although in hiding, they still awaited their leader, and Jonathan felt that very much would be gained if they knew definitely, instead of only surmising, that this leader was the nervous 'first' Loudoun, who once had been the men's prisoner.

The top of the Storr was a table covered with grass. It had taken some time to cover the ground and climb the steep rock to its summits, so all four lay out in the sun and looked at the view, and passed round Jonathan's binoculars to see whether, anywhere at hand, they could see the men for whom they sought.

But nothing was to be seen but sea and sky, the mountains north and south, the long island of Raasy to the east with the smaller island of Rona, and over to the west the sea again, running deeply into the land in Loch

Snizort's narrow fiords with Kensaleyre and Carbost tucked in at their ends like Norwegian sea and mountain villages or the romantic survival of Kotor in Dalmatia.

"This is a mug's game." said Jonathan, at the end of an hour. "I vote we make straight for Portree, and get back to the others."

Brian was deeply disappointed, but could find no argument against what his cousin proposed. They began the downward scramble as though they were stalking game, and kept their eyes open and paused very often to listen. Nothing untoward was seen or heard, and they reached the coast road and the car to find that MacIver had nothing to report.

Then the luck changed. They had run the car northwards past the Storr Rock, and on towards Culnaknock, and had got on to level ground (for they had decided to return by the longer route to Uig in case the men should choose to go back to Uig by the road across the hills from Staffin and Stenscholl), when Brian, who had the hawk-eyes common to boyhood, suddenly called out and pointed. There in the distance could then be distinguished two figures. The car soon caught them up.

"It's them all right," said Jonathan, with emphasis. He stopped the car just in front of the men, and he and MacIver got out. Brian leapt out behind them, anxious to join in the fun. The men began to run back by the way they had come, but Jonathan's long legs and MacIver's iron stride soon overtook them.

The fight was short and dirty. The men knew all the tricks of dockside and back street fighting, but Jonathan had lived among sailors and had spent five years in Cairo and the Levant, so that knives were a commonplace to him, to be dealt with immediately and effectually; a kick which began on a pivoted foot and ended against the side of an adversary's jaw was a useful and purposeful argument.

MacIver fought like a terrier fighting a rat. He was a stocky man, like many men from the West Highlands and the Hebrides, and, although he came from Skye, his ancestry was far more Scottish than Norse. He ended by almost biting the ear off his opponent, who had tackled him with a safety-razor blade. MacIver had never lived in a Glasgow slum, but he had met Glaswegians on holiday in Skye, and had learnt from them more than how to drive a car. He was angry with the man for having attempted to slash open his face, and went for him with a ferocity which surprised and alarmed the fellow.

“And now,” said Jonathan, when the two MacNeills had assisted in tying the men up and hustling them into the car, where, because of their bonds, they sat like two waxwork figures, the one very gory from his mauled and bleeding ear, the other very seriously bruised and not yet fully conscious, “where’s your pal?”

The men looked piteously at him; then one of them swore, but more in disgust than anger.

“I wish we knew,” he said. “He ought to have met us way back by that mountain ridge, near the water, but he’s never shown up all night, and we’re about through. I say, chum, don’t hand us to the busies. We never intended any harm. As for the kid, we never touched him. He’s a gentleman, and he’ll bear witness.”

“You bagged my clothes,” cried Brian, with whom this was a very sore point.

“What’s your boss’s name?” asked Jonathan.

“Loudoun.”

“What’s he like to look at?”

“Average-looking fellow.” Beyond this they seemed unable to go.

“And did he commit a murder at Craigullich?”

“Not so far as I know. Why should he have?”

“What did you fellows want at the house?”

“A plan of something. That’s all he told us. We never found it, though. That place is haunted.”

“Why did he have his brother’s body taken to the corrie on Beinn Cruachan?”

“I don’t know anything of that. I don’t know as ever I heard he had a brother. *I* don’t know . . .”

“Oh, yes, you do! You were seen there, on Beinn Cruachan. Drive on, Alan. I’ll keep an eye on these beauties. They’ll come across with what they know before I’ve done with them.”

But no amount of unofficial Third Degree seemed able to persuade the men that their knowledge was more extensive than they had already disclosed. Apparently they did know of the murder, and were afraid.

Chapter Thirteen

★

Cairn of Remembrance!
Carn na cuimhne!

War cry of the Farquharsons

★

The police, as Mrs. Bradley had surmised, were still in possession of Craigullich. She gathered that they did not like it there. It was obvious that they not only had heard of the hauntings but were prepared to swear to them.

"There comes a limping, thin fellow and is after telling us that a voice will be speaking in the small hours of the night, and that we should be listening for him," said Donald Cameron simply. "He is after telling us that the voice will be speaking of strange things and dark things, and that them that are after hearing it will be drowned. I am not knowing that I wish to hear the voice and be drowned after. Well, well, I am not remaining in the room to be hearing it, no, indeed I am not, so I am telling you."

"Where do you sleep, then?" Mrs. Bradley enquired.

"Sleep is it, indeed? You would be surprised. I do not sleep at all. It is James and Euan and Colenso who are all sleeping."

His cousins and brother denied this, but added that they, too, did not care to sleep in the dining-room of the house because of the warning they had had.

"The man who warned you is very likely the murderer of Mr. Loudoun," said Mrs. Bradley. "You've let him get away from you very easily. Which way did he go from here?"

"North, towards Ballachulish. I was seeing him go up the road as though he might make for the Duror inn," said James.

“I’d like to see the dining-room. I hope he hasn’t been playing any more tricks,” said Mrs. Bradley. “Have you the key of the door?”

“For why should you be needing the key? The door is open,” said James. He opened it for her, and then stepped back. Where the portrait and then the hunting badge had hung above the mantelpiece hung a very fair copy of the 1732 portrait of Prince Charles Edward Stewart.

“Good heavens!” said Mrs. Bradley. “Now what on earth does that mean? And what are those words on the door?”

Ian, who was escorting her, was the person to answer this question. His knowledge of the Gaelic was limited, but it was not difficult to read the triumphant scrawl across the cream-coloured paint on the door (which they saw as they turned to come out again).

Mic-an-oighre ran the script; and under that: *Britheamh.* Under that again, the top line was repeated, *Mic-an-oighre,* and then, beneath that, in larger, more ill-formed letters: *Frangag.*

“Queer stuff,” said Ian. “Who do you suppose wrote that?”

“I might be able to guess if you would kindly translate it.”

“Oh, yes. I’m sorry. Of course. Well, it’s all stuff taken from Scottish names and things. You can find it in the index of any book about the clans, I think. *Mic-an-oighre* means Son of the Heir. *Britheamh* means Judge. Then you get Son of the Heir repeated, so I suppose the writer thought it rather important, followed on the fourth line by *Frangag,* which means Free.

“It sounds to me a cry from the heart,” said Mrs. Bradley. “I deduce our Mr. Loudoun wrote it, but not for us to find. And yet . . .” She shook her head. “No. That won’t do.”

“What about the policemen? They speak Gaelic.”

“If I recognized the description given us of the limping, thin fellow who warned the policemen of the ghost-voice, that was Loudoun also. I think he knew them well enough to believe that they would not go in. Did he find out, by the way, that *you* speak Gaelic?”

“But I don’t speak it really, you know. I know some odd spots of it, that’s all. But even that did not come out.”

“Well, he would deduce that *I* shouldn’t know the language, therefore we must assume that the message was not for us. I believe we would do very well to return to Skye, unless there is news at the hotel. I will just instruct the policemen to arrest all the people who call, unless they can vouch for their honesty. What do you say?”

"Nothing. I just admire." He grinned, and dodged aside to avoid a sharp prod in the ribs. "I wonder how Laura's getting on?"

"She probably isn't. I wish now that I could recall her. Perhaps they will come back to-night. To-morrow may be too late for a share in the fun."

"Are things really hotting up, then?"

"I think they are at boiling point, child."

There was no news at the hotel, and Mrs. Bradley was doubtful at first whether to return to Skye or whether to try to track down Laura and Deborah in their quest of the bagman. She did not discuss the point with Ian, but left him to refuel and reprovision the *Kerisaig* in which they were to travel if they went back to Uig.

By the time he returned to the hotel she had made up her mind to seek the two girls first. Ian was disappointed, since she did not give him her special reason for this decision, but he agreed very readily to accompany her, and they hired a car and set off.

As the girls were walking, and had set off through Glencoe, she thought she might overtake them along the Old Road before they reached Kingshouse. Laura, with nothing to go on, had decided to track the bagman back to the inn on Loch Laggan, and although the Glencoe road was fantastically out of her way, she had some idea that as she had once met him there she might possibly find him there again.

This hope proved to be vain. She had reasoned that it must be so, but was rarely content to listen to reason only. She had accommodated herself to Deborah's pace, and they were having an early lunch at Kingshouse by the time Mrs. Bradley caught them up.

The change of plan took both girls by surprise, but neither asked any questions—Deborah because she did not much mind whether she walked or cruised, and Laura because she realized that some definite purpose lay behind the orders they were given, and she deduced from this that something had been discovered at Craigullich which bore closely on the change in the arrangements.

As they returned in the car along the New Road, Mrs. Bradley recounted the discovery of the inscription at Craigullich and described the reluctance of the Highland policemen to enter the haunted room. She also told of the change in the portraits.

"I see," said Laura. "Down with the Menzies and up with the Stewarts, that means,"

"Up with the Stewarts, anyway, I'm afraid," Mrs. Bradley soberly replied. Laura, who remembered that her clan had been 'out' for Charles Edward, rebuked her sharply for this treacherous observation, and even Ian grinned and said that she ought to have joined the right side. It was Deborah, who, more perceptive and a good deal more imaginative and intuitive than either, asked what it was that Mrs. Bradley feared.

"The death of the first Mr. Loudoun," she responded.

"Son of the heir, judge. Son of the heir, free," quoted Laura, frowning. "And the change in the portraits. Yes, I suppose it could be. In fact, it must be; it has come to my recollection that *Am Mèinnearach,* the original of the portrait which hung there first, was not on the side of the Stuarts in the Forty-Five. The clan was 'out' under Menzies of Shian, who was not the chief. The chief took no part in the rising."

The *Kerisaig* was ready for sea. Ian took his place at the controls, and the auxiliary cutter was backed out gently, her nose turned westwards out of Loch Leven and then soon southwards down Loch Linnhe. The cruise back to Skye, to the magic island to which all who have ever made a landfall there are bound to return at some time, had begun.

It was a calm and a lovely evening. There was a smoothness on the long sea-loch and a peace of unearthly beauty in water and sky. On the banks the occasional trees were as still as the rocks, and the mountains on either side were remote as dreams. Ian steered by the eastern shore. Behind the boat Sgurr Dhonuill dropped away and soon they were drawing level with Meall Ban. On the further shore they passed Creach Bheinn with the lower and smaller Glas Bheinn close at hand. Green Lismore came in sight, a long lizard of land. They took the Lynn of Lorne passage and ran up the Sound of Mull to Tobermory, where they decided to remain for the night.

Meanwhile on Skye the prisoners had been taken to Uig and back to the *bothy* on the croft they had annexed from the lawful heirs and assigns (if any) of the Widow MacShuffie. Jonathan had no intention of informing the police against them until Mrs. Bradley had seen and questioned them.

It was clear that their proximity was unwelcome to old Morag. They were dumped on the floor, still tied up, whilst MacIver and the MacNeills went back to their homes to report their return. Highlanders being naturally secretive, it had been almost unnecessary to swear them to silence

concerning the illegal and highly questionable proceedings in which they had taken part, but Jonathan thought it well to obtain their promise that they would say nothing about the kidnappers.

He sent Brian to telegraph Mrs. Bradley the news of the captive and gave him the form of words to use. He told him to drive in with Rory MacIver to Portree and send the message from there.

"Two birds in a cage," the message ran. "Ask for them from Morag."

As it happened, the *Kerisaig* had left Ballachulish before this message was delivered, but it came to the same thing in the end, as the party from the mainland were already on their way to Uig. They left Tobermory as early as they could in the morning, and by midday were off Arisaig and pointed for Cuillin Sound. Long before evening they had reached Uig Bay and were anchored and signalling young MacIver to take them ashore in his boat.

Old Morag seemed glad to see Mrs. Bradley, and observed with great composure that now there were sensible people about, no doubt some sensible proceedings would ensue.

"Do you know these men?" asked Mrs. Bradley, surveying the scowling captives and the placid old woman. Morag pulled her shawl more closely about her shoulders, and replied:

"I will have seen them, indeed, and they wishful to be killing me and mine."

"Come outside," said Mrs. Bradley, "and let us talk. Who are these men?"

Morag seated herself on the low stone wall within the compound. It had been built to help stack up the peat. She folded her hands in the end of the shawl, shook her head, and then replied:

"I will be telling you all I know."

"Good. I hope you will go back to the late Mr. Stewart's marriage."

"You will be meaning I should tell you of Malcolm Stewart of Glen Ullich, who was hanged for the death of Loudoun."

"Yes, that's it."

"Och, aye, then. It will not be a very long story. It is plain enough, I am thinking."

She retold the story as far as Mrs. Bradley already knew it from Janet Forbes. Then she said:

“After the death of Malcolm Stewart and the marriage of his wife to his murderer—for it was Rory Loudoun that was minded to have him hanged, and would not be resting night or day until he was dead—I was teaching the laddie to remember and to destroy.”

“The little boy, James Stewart?”

“He grew up to hate his mother and her man. I was the cause of it, and the heart of me rejoices that it was so.”

Mrs. Bradley could not concur in this, and remained silent. Feeling this coldness as a rebuke, the old woman paused for a moment, and then broke out again:

“And why would not I have been doing so, let you ask you! Why would I be sitting by the hearth and going to my grave with all that black hatred upon me, and I not to be revenged? Is a man to be hanged like a dog and no one to be caring for him at all?”

“If you are asking for my opinion,” said Mrs. Bradley, “I think you are expressing an archaic point of view, understandable, lamentable, and false.”

“Well, well,” said Morag, who did not follow a word of this intentionally circumlocutory criticism. “Well, well, indeed.”

“You brought up young Stewart not only to hate his stepfather but also his half-brothers. I suppose they were twins,” said Mrs. Bradley.

“There is an end of the Loudoun brothers. There are none to be coming after them. It is the end, if the fires of hell burn me,” said old Morag.

“But one of them, surely, is alive? Hector Loudoun is still alive. These men are his servants, are they not?”

“They will be nobody’s servants now,” said Morag with finality. “You may let them go when you wish. They can do no more than they have done, and that is little enough, poor fellows, God knows!”

“The police will decide,” said Mrs. Bradley. Old Morag looked obstinate, but said no more until Mrs. Bradley, after a moment, asked:

“And why were you content to stay on at the house and serve Hector Loudoun, I wonder?”

“I was not serving him, but James Stewart. There was that in the loch of which many fine tales were told, and I was to stay there, to keep all safe. My name is Morag Stewart, and I was hearing all secrets.”

“You talk in riddles,” said Mrs. Bradley, indicating that this fact made her impatient. “Tell me directly what you mean.”

"I am not sure that I should be telling, and until I have leave from James Stewart I will not tell."

"Very well. When do you return to Craigullich?"

"At any time I could be going there. I will be going to-day if you, or some of you, will go with me. I am not knowing how to find my way, and the sea to be between me and my home, look you."

"Very well. You shall come with us when we go. But I warn you that the police are there. They will question you, and you will be required to answer their questions candidly, and not as you answer mine."

"Indeed, indeed, I am willing to answer anything you ask, but I canna tell secrets that have been trusted to me by James Stewart, aye, and by Malcolm Stewart before him."

"Very well. We will proceed upon that understanding. How long were you living at Craigullich?"

"I was living at Craigullich since I was a young girl."

"All the time? Did you stay, then, after Malcolm Stewart was dead?"

"I did that. Does that puzzle you, then? It is what I was telling you before. I had treasures to look to." She chuckled with senile malice.

"You have never left Craigullich at all?"

"No, no, I have never left. Where would I go, and what would I do among strangers? I was born in the *clachan* beyond the glen, and I do not know any place, indeed, besides that place."

"How long was the house empty except for yourself?"

"I am thinking you know the answer to that. It is trying to make a net for me you are."

"No, I would not do that with you if I knew you were speaking the truth. Please answer me."

"The house was empty from the time Malcolm Stewart was taken."

"Arrested?"

"Aye. Taken by the police and hanged by the neck until he died. Och, ochen, my sorrow, my sorrow!—until the day of his death."

"Mrs. Stewart went away, then, and left the little boy with you."

"Aye, she did that, and was marrying again very soon. Mr. Loudoun, Rory Loudoun, the thief, the murderer, the false-spoken wicked man, was marrying on her in England, and then I heard tell they went away."

"But you never heard of twin boys?"

“I did not hear all, no doubt. But one thing I know. I ken well where James Stewart will be finding a fortune, but I am to tell no one where that may be.”

“What had Tobermory to do with it?” asked Mrs. Bradley, remembering a puzzling point. The old woman looked at her sharply.

“And what would you be knowing of Tobermory?”

“Nothing,” said Mrs. Bradley patiently. “That is why I am asking you what bearing Tobermory could have on your story about the treasure.”

“Are you after hearing of the Tobermory galleon?”

“That old story? Yes.”

“Then that is of it, and more I canna tell.”

“Who is Mr. Ure?”

“I dinna ken.”

“He is the man who intended to purchase Craigullich. He represents himself to be a friend to your James Stewart. Have you never heard his name before?”

“He is no friend to James Stewart, or I would be hearing.”

“But he is. He told us so.”

“Are you after speaking with the man’s ghost, then, that you ask me that? Those that ill-wished James Stewart—aye, and Malcolm Stewart, too—are dead. They are ghosts that walk the moors, and not living men.”

“Ghosts? Ah, yes, and that reminds me,” said Mrs. Bradley, delighted to have some evidence that her last and wildest theory might be a fact, and anxious to change the subject before old Morag realized the tremendous piece of news she had given away. “What about the ghost at Craigullich?”

“I do not understand. There is no ghost at Craigullich. There is not even the ghost of Malcolm Stewart, and if any haunted there it would be he. Unless, maybe . . .” She broke off, and looked both cunning and confused.

“Hector Loudoun believes that he haunts there.”

“Maybe he would be the one that would see and hear him. But he sleeps sound enough now,” said Morag.

“Who does?”

“Malcolm Stewart sleeps sound. He has been avenged. They are dead men that wished him hanged. There is not one of them left. Och, aye! He sleeps sound enough now, for the last will soon sleep beside him.”

They sat side by side, each meditating on the past; Morag on what she knew, Mrs. Bradley on what she surmised. Then Mrs. Bradley said gently:

"And Hector Loudoun? Will *he* haunt Craigullich, do you think?"

"It is not Hector Loudoun, but Alexander Loudoun, who is after being killed at Craigullich, and it is not in that one to haunt anywhere. There was no treachery in the killing of him, no more than in killing a wee lamb. There was nothing ill in killing Alexander Loudoun, and now there is nothing at all of him left, at all, at all, at all."

Mrs. Bradley got up and brushed her skirt, although this was an unnecessary action, for the wall, scoured daily by the sea-winds, was clean and free from dust. Not even moss grew between its crannied stones. Without another word she went into the *bothy,* where Jonathan still mounted patient guard over the prisoners.

"What next have you to do?" she enquired of them. They grunted, but did not answer.

"For whom did you work?" she went on.

"For a fellow called Ure," one answered. "He told us what to do and gave us our pay when Loudoun quit."

"Then you cheated him, and worked for somebody else?"

"We took our pay where we could get it. It isn't easy for us to get anything to do."

"It wouldn't be easy for you to be honest, you mean. I understand and agree. Why did you take the body of Mr. Loudoun to Beinn Cruachan?"

"We were told to get it out of the house. His brother told us."

"Did he tell you where to take it?"

"He told us to take it away. He said we could chuck it in the lake."

"What lake?"

"The little lake by the house."

"Why didn't you do it?"

"We figured on holding him up."

"Blackmailing him?"

"I never used that word, lady. Lady, be a sport and let us go. We haven't done anything wrong. I'm real sorry about the little boy, but we did him no harm. He'll tell you that himself."

"He didn't give you much chance to harm him," said Jonathan.

"Why did Hector Loudoun suggest the lake?" Mrs. Bradley enquired. But the men could not answer except to tell what they seemed to believe was the truth—namely, that they supposed their erstwhile prisoner on Skye to be called Ure.

"But Ure gave us something to leave it be," said the first man.

"What were you going to do, then? Turn King's Evidence as soon as the murder was discovered?" asked Jonathan, trying to disentangle this muddled evidence.

"You *didn't* know that the body had been taken to Beinn Cruachan, did you?" said Mrs. Bradley. She knew the whole story now, and could press them hard. "I suppose you realize, all the same, that you've laid yourselves open to arrest as accessories after the fact? And what do you know about the ghost which haunted Craigullich?" The men did not answer. "And what were you looking for in the house when you heard the ghost-voice and ran away?"

"Looking for nothing," growled the man who had spoken least.

"You were looking for buried treasure, or, rather, for a plan to show where treasure was hidden. If you had found anything, I would have had you arrested on a charge of stealing by finding."

"If you know all about it, why ask us?" said the man bitterly. "That's a busy all over, that is."

"A female nark," added his companion, continuing with a succession of epithets which Jonathan interrupted with a threat of his boot in their ribs. Mrs. Bradley, who had been called most things in her time, and had no particular objection to being called them all over again, cackled grimly and told her nephew not to trouble.

"You won't let them go?" said he. She shook her head, evoking, by this god-like gesture, another stream of profanity from the floor.

"I don't think we shall get much more from them," said Jonathan, leading the way outside. "What's the next thing to be done? Do their lies lead anywhere?"

"We can do nothing much until the police arrive," Mrs. Bradley answered, "and when that will be, and from where, I have no idea. We shall charge the men with kidnapping Brian. That will keep them safely out of the way whilst we put our best foot forward to prevent the third murder."

"Prevent—what do you mean?"

"Stewart will murder Hector Loudoun unless we prevent it."

"Stewart? I thought you knew Stewart was dead."

"From what I have learned, I do not see how he can be. The trouble is that I don't know where he is, and I don't know how to get at him. I think he is Laura's bagman."

"But that man who was killed on Rannoch Moor?"

"A certain Mr. Ure, child. That seems certain."

"I thought you had decided that Ure was Stewart."

"I had. I have changed my mind."

"Why?"

"Old Morag's evidence has caused me to reconsider my opinion, that's all. Several opinions, in fact."

"I see. Why, what did she say?"

"It wasn't so much what she said, child, as what she didn't say. I am led to infer that she knows James Stewart is alive. We know, too, that Stewart has been to Craigullich, and has left his warnings to Loudoun. He will kill him unless we can stop him."

"What do we do, then?"

"I have not the faintest idea. I wish I had."

"Sounds helpful."

"Doesn't it? There's another thing I'm sure of, too. These men do not know where either man is, any more than we do. Nothing would suit them better than to have another card to play to save themselves from arrest. They haven't one."

"They could give us false information and hope that we would believe it. That's what they've done already."

"They don't even realize that we would like to have particular information about Stewart, child, and I was careful not to put the thought into their heads. The question at the moment is what we shall do with old Morag."

"The question for *me* is, if Ure is not Stewart, why was he killed, and who killed him?"

"I still think Alexander Loudoun killed him whilst Hector Loudoun tried to give his brother an alibi at Craigullich."

"Oh, so you still think Alexander Loudoun killed the man—either Ure or Stewart—on Rannoch Moor?"

"There seems nothing else to think. No suspicion has fallen on anyone else, since the police have formed no theory as to the identity of Mr. Ure's assailant. I see now that Ure did exactly what Hector Loudoun in his typescript said that he did. Ure wanted to purchase Glen Ullich. He must have heard some rumour about the treasure. It may have been more than a rumour. I should say he met Stewart in prison, or abroad . . ."

“Stewart? In prison, or abroad?”

“Where else could he have been, except in prison or abroad, if the Loudouns could so easily take possession of his house and land? I repeat that he met Stewart and learned from him something about the treasure that was drowned in the lake. The Loudouns knew where the treasure was, too. They tried to fob off Ure at first, but when he grew persistent—and threatened to get in touch with Stewart and inform him of the theft of his property—the brothers, to deal with him, invited him down to the house, arranged a preliminary meeting on the moor and there Alexander Loudoun killed him. Hector Loudoun, incomparably the more intelligent of the brothers, had another object in view. He wanted an alibi for himself (an alibi which, as they were so much alike in appearance, Alexander could share) but he also intended to murder his brother and claim what was found for himself.

“The plan would have succeeded but for two things. One was that Alexander Loudoun could not sustain the character that his brother had built up at Craigullich, and, thanks to Catherine, he could be proved to be another and not the same Loudoun as she had met at Craigullich. The other was that Stewart was not so far away as the brothers had thought. In fact, he was hot on the trail, both of his false friend Ure and of the Loudouns themselves. We don’t know at what point he realized that Ure would betray the confidence he had reposed in him, and he may even have been prepared to take Ure into partnership in order to recover his property, but . . .”

“But the fact remains that Stewart is the son of a murderer. Malcolm Stewart, if he did shoot David Loudoun, deserved, according to the law, to be hanged.”

“There is a good deal of work to be done at some time on that case, child. I am prepared to wager that Rory Loudoun’s brother died as the result of a duel with pistols, and not as the result of a cowardly and murderous attack. But, whatever the truth about that matter—and it cannot concern us now—the young James Stewart was never allowed to forget that his father was hanged.”

She nodded towards where old Morag was seated on the low stone wall.

“Old Morag?”

“Oh, yes. She’s been telling me so herself. The old clan spirit survives, and the old clan hatreds, too. I know families now—in the colonies mostly,

I must admit—where a MacDonald will not marry a Campbell. Don't you recollect what Loudoun put in his script—'there is Glencoe to remember.'"

"Yes, I did read that. But, look here, if your surmise is correct, and a duel was fought, couldn't Malcolm Stewart have claimed self-defence at the trial?"

"With his wife another man's mistress? He may not have known which Loudoun brother was the man—he may have picked the wrong one or the right one—that we may never know; it is one of the extraordinary secrets of this most extraordinary case—but he did know that he had been dishonoured. He had nothing to live for. The Highlander broods over wrongs. He prefers to suffer to the limit (and beyond it) of endurance if he feels that he has been wronged. It was one more sin to lay on his wife and her paramour; it was one more burden to bind on their consciences, and one more branding with which to sear their memories. It was part of his revenge on his wife that he should be convicted and hanged. He probably looked forward to laughing in hell at the thought of it."

"I shouldn't say this to Laura and Ian," said Jonathan. "They are proud of their Highland blood,"

"I am proud of mine, although I boast only a drop," said Mrs. Bradley sincerely. "Och, aye," she added tentatively, somewhat to the amusement of her nephew. "But the loch," she went on, "The loch. The treasure is in the loch, and I know now, from what Morag says, and because Malcolm Stewart allowed himself to be hanged, that when the treasure is discovered the whole of this mystery will be solved."

Chapter Fourteen

★

Victory or death!
Buaidh no bas!

War cry of the MacDougalls and of the MacNeills of Barra

★

The pursuit of Stewart, which, as presupposed by Mrs. Bradley, included the pursuit of Hector Loudoun, offered the supreme problem that no one knew where to begin it. Laura's original plan, framed before Mrs. Bradley had taken her and Deborah off to Skye, was therefore followed, as it had the merits of logic and commonsense.

The search-party consisted of Deborah, Laura, Ian, and Jonathan. Mrs. Bradley and Catherine were left in charge of Brian and were taken off on the *Kerisaig* to Ballachulish as soon as the police had arrested the kidnappers. Old Morag was left on the croft of Mrs. MacShuffie. She could do no harm, it was felt, and, apart from Craigullich, which was still in possession of the police, she had no home, so far as anyone knew, for she would give no details of kith and kin and it was taken for granted that she had no one to whom she could go. There was just the chance, too, that if Mrs. Bradley were right, and Stewart was still alive, he would make some attempt to get in touch with her. The police had been warned of this, and were requested to combine vigilance with discretion. This they were able to do partly because they did not believe any harm of the poor old woman, partly because of their own innate courtesy, partly because their conceptions of vigilance were hazy and their ideas of discretion very liberal, and partly because they were afraid of the old carline's tongue and grandmotherly curses. The Gaelic lends itself to cursing of a peculiar and religious

intensity quite divorced from profanity and ordinary, vulgar invocation of the Deity and the devil. The old woman, according to an evocative and silken-tongued inspector with a dark moustache and a sing-song, dulcet accent which rivalled that of Morag herself, was capable of calling down upon any offending heads the wrath that broods in the mountains and hovers on cairns and in the glens. Mrs. Bradley did not pretend to believe him, but paid silent respect to his opinions.

To Loch Laggan, therefore, went the search-party, with a word and a hint to Inspector Cameron and his relatives on the way, and Laura enquired for the bagman. He had gone towards Kingussie, they were told. Was he walking, or had he gone by bus? He was on foot when he set out, but they thought perhaps he might have picked up the bus along the road.

The party had come by car from Ballachulish by way of Fort William and the road through Glen Spean. They filled up the petrol tank at Kingussie, and there went into conclave. It seemed the most likely thing that Stewart was taking a roundabout way back to Craigullich. If it were so, it followed that he would have turned off southward at Newtonmore, through which they had passed on their way to Kingussie. It was only about four miles back along the road. Whether he knew that the police were still at Craigullich was doubtful, but, in any case, he probably would not hurry. It would have been useful to know whether he proposed to walk all the way, part of the way, or not at all, but there seemed no method by which this could be determined, as, having no official standing in the matter, they did not want to ask too many questions.

"One thing we ought to do," said Jonathan suddenly, as the car turned out of Newtonmore and began to drive slowly across Badenoch. "We ought to look out for his suitcase. If we're right in thinking he's chasing Hector Loudoun, he'll want to travel light, I should imagine, and he may not need to keep up the fiction of the bagman."

"He'd need the suitcase to stay at hotels each night," Laura pointed out.

"Probably not. They're used to hikers up here. And if he *is* on foot, he'd make himself suspicious lugging a hefty great suitcase along the roads."

"But he may still be acting as a pedlar."

"Yes, he may, of course." And there they left it. The railway followed the road, and at Dalwhinnie Station, at the northern end of Loch Erricht,

Laura got out of the car and gave a description of Stewart to the porter on duty. He had no recollection of such a man, either with or without a suitcase. Laura was not disappointed. She had hardly expected any luck, but had felt a moral compulsion to ask the question. She rejoined the others, and the car crawled on through the Pass of Drumochter between mountains —Creagan Mor, Carn no Caim, Geal Charn on the borders of Erricht, Meall a' Chaeruinn, A'Mharconaich, higher than the others, Glas Mheall Mor with its sudden, soaring peak, and, highest of all, Beinn Udlamain, flanked by Sgairneach and the Atholl Sow rising from the road.

At Dalnaspidal Laura enquired again. There was still no sign of their man and nothing to be learned of him at the station.

There was a footpath on the western side of Loch Erricht, but it was thought unlikely that the man had followed it, as it seemed to peter out at Alder Bay, three miles from the southern end of the loch just below the Alder Burn, which had its source in the magnificent heights of Ben Alder, above Prince Charlie's Cave and Ben Alder Lodge.

Laura rejoined the party, and the car crawled on through Glen Garry on the way to Struan (which was just off the road) and Blair Atholl. At Blair Atholl they had their first bit of luck, for there was gossip at the hotel about a bagman's suitcase filled with odds and ends of combs, toothpaste, cards of elastic, toothbrushes, cheap fancy handkerchiefs, cards of buttons, hooks and eyes and press-fasteners, shaving soap, brilliantine, and safetypins. It had been picked out of the River Tilt below the Old Bridge, about a mile north of the town.

Laura could scarcely ask to be allowed to see whether she could identify it, and doubted whether, after its immersion, she would be able to, even if she had the chance, but it seemed more than likely that it was the one which Stewart had carried and now had got rid of to make his journey easier.

"Almost looks as though he might have ridden this far, perhaps on the train," said Ian, "and that now he's going on on foot. If he did come this far by train, or bus, or whatnot, we've no time to lose, I should say. I suppose he chucked the case in the river overnight, and that may have been several nights ago. One thing, he won't be able to slug Hector Loudoun at Craigullich. The police and Mrs. Bradley will see to that. The trouble is, where is Loudoun? And does Stewart know where he is?"

The road went on through Killiecrankie, dropping sharply southward through the Pass. The old road was just to the west, and from it a turning led to Loch Tummel, on the direct route to Loch Rannoch and so to Glencoe and the Kingshouse Inn.

"I don't know whether we can get the car that way," said Jonathan. "And, if we do, it is only as far as Rannoch Station."

"We can get as far as Kinloch Rannoch and ask again," said Laura. "Better still, we can separate. Two can take the car and go on to Pitlochry and turn off to Aberfeldy and along Loch Tay to Killin, and the other two can hike to Kinloch Rannoch."

"It is over twenty miles to Kinloch Rannoch," said Deborah, who did not usually join in the discussions but had patiently and intelligently read the map, "and I think we can get the car as far as that."

So they drove past the falls and along the north shore of Loch Tummel, due east, and along the River Tummel, past Tummel Bridge with its generating station, and across the little streams from Beinn a' Chullaich, then past a wooded plantation and on to the hotel which stood at the eastern end of Rannoch Loch.

"If he's passed through here we may catch him," said Laura confidently. "If he's gone the long way round and is riding on buses and coaches, he may have done us after all. If only we knew where Loudoun is hiding, we could make our way directly to him and wait for Stewart to catch up with him, I suppose."

Their quest, indeed, seemed rather hopeless. Enquiries in Kinloch Rannoch, a very small place, produced no result whatsoever.

"He may be disguised again," said Laura. "It wasn't so easy, having seen him in a beard as the artist, to recognize him as the pedlar. These people, or somebody here, may have seen him and yet not recognize the description. I don't really suppose they take all that much notice of tourists. If he came as a fisherman or something . . ." Her voice trailed off. She was discouraged.

"Aunt Adela's probably rounded him up by this time," said Jonathan cheerfully. "But never mind. We're here, and the weather is grand, and there's plenty to eat. Don't fret. You'll be losing weight. Anyway, there's nothing more doing to-day. We've come over a hundred miles, and I'm not taking Deb any farther."

“Oh, please don’t make a nuisance of me!” said Deborah. “Let’s go on to Rannoch Station, if everyone wants to.”

“Nonsense,” said her husband. “You and I are going to stroll about half a mile by the side of the loch and back, and then I’m going to sit still and smoke another pipe, and then we’re going to bed. I’m not going to share my married life with a hag, and a hag you’ll be if you don’t have a rest and get some sleep.”

Deborah examined her lovely face in a mirror, looked up and smiled, and gave in. It was then almost half-past seven, for the car had crawled most of the way, and there had been frequent stops whilst Laura asked news of their quarry at stations and inns.

They were up at seven and on the road again by half-past eight. They left the car at the hotel, and walked by the side of Loch Rannoch. The first three miles were uninteresting, but, once past the chemical works on the northern bank, the country, flanked by mountains lower than those they had passed on the previous day, was wooded, although still sparsely, and the road was lonely and wild. The way crossed brooks, and passed the little village of Killichonan and a tiny island in the loch, and at the end of eight or nine miles of picturesque walking they crossed the River Erricht and came round by the end of the loch.

“The other side would have been much prettier,” said Laura. She referred to the woods which, from Meall Druidhe to beyond Coille Mhor, had shaded the banks and grown thickly—especially the Black Wood of Rannoch—for more than a mile inland.

At Rannoch Station the road petered out except for a branch which ran northward from tiny Loch Bigheach and crossed the slopes of Sron Leachd a’ Chaerruich, west of Beinn Pharlagain, but this did not seem to be helpful. Laura made her usual remarks, and asked what had now become routine questions at the station, but still there was no result. Unless the bagman was lost among the mountains, he had either taken a different route from the one which the party had been following, or else had disappeared into air.

“Well, I don’t know,” said Laura, returning disconsolate to the others. “There seems nothing for it but to slog back to Kinloch Rannoch and try again.”

“Not to-day we don’t,” said Jonathan firmly. “We’ve done about eighteen miles already this morning. If we can get a conveyance, well and good. If not, we wait for a train and proceed to Bridge of Orchy, there to

pick up a bus or coach, or anything else that's going, and so home to Ballachulish, where, ten to one, Aunt Adela has already laid this Stewart by the heels."

"And what about the car?" demanded Laura.

"Telegraph for it to-morrow. Bound to be someone able and willing to drive it back for us at some time. Anyway"—he glanced at his wife, for whom the tramp had been more than enough already—"here I am, and here I stick until I can get on the train."

"I hope it snows, and you stick in a drift," said Laura.

"He's talking sense," said Ian. "None of us wants to tramp back to Kinloch Rannoch, and there's no hotel within miles."

"There's a refreshment place by the loch. I saw it as we came past."

"But I shouldn't think they would put us up for the night. And anyway, it's still the middle of the day. What should we do until dark? We can't keep on walking. It's crazy."

"All right," said Laura, gloomily. Her brother laughed.

"Cheer up," he said. "Everything comes to him that waits—even trains. Let's park ourselves on the platform, and you, if you're still so full of beans, go and get speech of the porter again, and find out whether we've a chance of getting to Bridge of Orchy any time this side of Christmas."

"Don't look now," said Laura, masking sudden excitement under the imbecile catch-phrase, "but that's our man coming along. What had I better do? I'm the only one he will recognize."

"Oh, nod to him, and speak. If he's shy, he'll soon shake us off. Not a hint we're trailing him, of course. Behave as though we're a hiking party simply and solely."

"Hullo! The world's a small place," said Laura chattily to the bagman as he came up to the station entrance.

The man turned a keen but spectacled gaze on her. She was certain of her facts, but pretended to hedge as she met no responding smile or word of greeting.

"I beg your pardon," said the man, "but . . ."

"I'm awfully sorry," said Laura. "I thought for the moment I knew you. Well, now that we've broken the ice, have you any idea at all when we get a train? "

"Where to?"

"Well, it doesn't matter to us particularly. We're just roving round, you know. Here to-day and gone to-morrow sort of thing."

"I don't know the times of the trains," said the man indifferently. Laura went back to her party and announced loudly that she had made her usual *gaffe* of accosting utter strangers believing them to be persons that she knew, but that, in this case, it did not matter in the least, as the man, whoever he was, knew nothing about the trains, so she supposed they had better just wait and see what train turned up and where it was going.

They were fortunate in that the train for Bridge of Orchy, on the line for Tyndrum, pulled in to the station within twenty minutes of the time of their arrival, and doubly fortunate in that the brightness of the morning had clouded over, and, in place of the innocent sky and the summer sun, enormous rain-clouds, inky with the weight of their moisture, hung on the mountain slopes and hid the peaks, and the whole land seemed to brood, awaiting the rain.

Over Rannoch Moor went the railway, with its wooden palings on either side to keep the drifts of winter snow and the red deer off the line, and with its little wooden bridges by which the deer could cross. At Bridge of Orchy they waited, nerves on the stretch, to make sure that their man alighted. As soon as he jumped out, they followed.

As though certain that he had thrown Laura off the scent by pretending not to know her, the man strode off without a glance behind to see whether anyone followed. The rain, which was sweeping down Beinn Dorain and Beinn an Dothaidh in sheets and torrents and leaping waterfalls and cataracts of water, was enough to deter the stoutest.

Jonathan glanced at his wife and then at Ian.

"I'm not going out in this," he said simply and with finality.

"We must follow him now we've found him, Jon," said Deborah.

"I agree," said Ian, who had the Scottish contempt for rain. He put on his waterproof, pulled down his cap, turned up his collar, and stepped out. His sister strode out beside him. Jonathan held Deborah back.

"No, you don't," he said calmly. "This is where the luxury-loving southerner sits back and stops taking notice. In a minute I'm going to borrow an umbrella from the stationmaster, conduct you to an ancient but no doubt workable automobile which I think I see, between spots, in the middle distance, and we're going to drive to the inn which is on the shores of Loch Tulla, a mile or two up a secondary road, and there we are going to

eat and drink in the dry while those earnest Highlanders chase Stewart all over the moors, and, in the end, lose him because he knows the neighbourhood and they don't."

"I don't want to go to the inn," said Deborah indignantly. "We're with them, and we ought to stick to them. It's disgusting to let them down like this! I'm going, *if* you are not."

"Neither of us is going," said Jonathan, grinning. He took her firmly by the arm and conducted her to the stationmaster with a request for the loan of his umbrella to allow the lady to reach the station car. Deborah, rebellious but helpless, a state of things to which she was slow to accustom herself, was put into the interior of the vehicle, and with a lurch and a couple of bangs they shot forward into the deluge.

It certainly was not very far to the inn. They were welcomed. A fire was burning. Jonathan, who had had the forethought to bring pyjamas and toothbrushes for both of them in a rucksack, slung this informal baggage into a corner, took out his pipe and filled it, lighted it carefully, lay back in a long armchair, and smiled sleepily and serenely at his wife. Deborah made a grimace at him, took her shoes off, and held out a foot towards the fire.

"Well?" said he, nodding at the windows, against which the rain slashed and streamed.

"Perhaps you were right," said Deborah, laughing. "But I'm sorry for Ian and Laura. And, after all, they are the ones who are doing the decent thing. I'm still ashamed of us both."

"Yes, so am I," said Jonathan, smoking tranquilly. "Very much ashamed. But there it is." He caught the cushion Deborah flung at him and placed it behind his head. "Many thanks. You shall stay up an extra quarter of an hour if you continue to be a good girl."

Just over fifty minutes later, Stewart, soaked to the skin, shed his waterproof coat in the hall and came into the lounge. Five minutes later, Laura and Ian followed his example. The sky grew less angry but more sullen. The rain came down as though in irritated answer to importunate and wearisome prayer.

At six the guests dined. At half-past six, a third of the way through the meal, Hector Loudoun walked into the dining-room and seated himself at the only vacant table. Ian drew back into the shadows. The table was in an alcove. He hoped he would not be seen. The game was in the hands of the seekers, but it would not do to play any of the cards too soon.

Meanwhile Mrs. Bradley was employing her time in collecting such evidence as she had gathered about the whole of the extraordinary circumstances in which she had decided to interest herself. It made an interesting survey. She headed it:

Evidence of Survival of Clan Hatred and of the Blood Feud in North-West Scotland in C 20, and tabulated it under sub-headings:

1. Loudoun (A) and the ghost-voice at Craigullich.
2. The disappearance of Morag the housekeeper.
3. The corpse on Rannoch Moor, including the comparative inaccessibility of the moor and the readiness with which the body was discovered.
4. The artist of Glencoe.
5. The substitution of Loudoun (B) for Loudoun (A) at Craigullich, the institution of a new housekeeper, and the fact that Loudoun (B) was surprised by the ghost-voice.
6. The introduction of the name of Ure into the typescript shown to Ian by Loudoun (A), and the fact that Ian was allowed to carry the typescript away.
7. The truth told in the typescript.
8. The falsehoods told in the typescript.
9. The evidence of Janet Forbes.
10. The evidence of old Morag.
11. The evidence of the criminals captured in Skye.
12. Laura's discovery of the artist turned bagman at Loch Laggan hotel.
13. Discovery of the body (from Craigullich) on Beinn Cruachan.
14. Change of employer by the two criminals.
15. The search of Craigullich.
16. Mysterious references to Loch Ullich.

She filled in her notes under these various headings and went off to Oban to lay the sum total of her deductions before the inspector. Cameron was impressed.

"Well, well," said he, very pleased.

"But we must not have another murder," said Mrs. Bradley. "Therefore I suggest that your people remain in charge of Craigullich, and that others are warned to take Stewart and Hector Loudoun into custody whenever and wherever they appear."

"I cannot arrest men for nothing."

"It is not nothing. Stewart can be arrested for—what can Stewart be arrested for? In America it would be for spitting on the sidewalk. Surely there is something in the law of Scotland . . ."

The inspector gave a sudden, illuminated smile.

"I will be seeing to it," he promised. "And Hector Loudoun is to be arrested on the suspicion of having murdered his brother Alexander Loudoun and of having transported his body to Beinn Cruachan with intent to hide all traces of his crime. I canna think," he broke off, turning to Mrs. Bradley confidingly, "why he should have been doing that same. What way would it be helping him to have his brother on Beinn Cruachan?"

"I've been thinking that over myself," said Mrs. Bradley. "I think it was to get those men out of the way. He gave them a hint, I think, that the plan of the buried treasure was to be found on Alexander Loudoun's body. Thus he got rid of the men from Craigullich, thinking that he could then seize the opportunity to drag the loch. He did not drag it because your people were there. Now he knows, thanks to the message scrawled on the dining-room door, and the change in the portraits, that he has to account for Stewart, the rightful heir, returned unexpectedly (probably from abroad) before he can steal the treasure. Stewart wrote the message."

"Aye, that will mean another murder," said Cameron, nodding. He went off equably to deal with it, but returned in a moment to say, "Will you be after knowing that there is a half-built boat in the woodshed west of the house? "

"Ah, so the loch *is* the place! I knew it must be. That accounts for their delay in dragging it, then. It must be a good deal deeper than it looks," said Mrs. Bradley. She went off to resume her work on the Ordnance map, and began to plot out the way that the two men would come to Craigullich. She took for a working hypothesis the theory that the house itself, or, at any rate, the glen, would be the prearranged meeting-place. She was interested, therefore, in finding some point of intersection at which two routes would converge. At this point she would place the attempt at murder, or, if not at this point, then at some place between it and the house. She deduced that Loudoun would know that the police were at the house. She did not know whether Stewart would know this or not. It was not likely to be in the papers, and she imagined that from Stewart's point of view the fewer people

he spoke to *en route* the better. There was also the point that the police could have read the message.

Her maps became a series of circles and crosses as she patiently plotted the ways of approaching the house, and worked out the likeliest spot at which the two men might attempt to ambush one another.

"Now what, I wonder?" muttered Ian. The two men, apparently unconscious of each other's presence, said nothing to anyone in the lounge except the waiter. He brought whisky to the one and a long draught of ale to the other. The hounds watched the hares drinking; Deborah more or less indifferently, because the whole affair seemed to her to lack any sort of reality and significance; Jonathan sardonically, because he did not propose to over-exert himself in a matter which seemed to him no affair of his; Laura with a certain amount of excitement because she was young, romantically-minded, and keenly delighted in the childish pleasure of the chase; Ian soberly, weighing up the chances which he and Jonathan would stand against two presumably desperate men, one of whom was already a murderer by commission, the other (and the more dangerous) of whom was probably a murderer in anticipation, and one would not brook interference in the consummation of his private vengeance.

The time passed slowly. Then Loudoun got up and went out. At a word from Jonathan, Ian got up and followed him. Laura, without hesitation, followed her brother. Jonathan glanced at Deborah, leaned back in his seat, picked up his glass and said quietly:

"My turn when the other one leaves. Stay here until we come back, if I have to go."

"Be careful, won't you? " she said.

"Of course. You're worth coming back to. Talk about something while I watch him. He's very fidgety. I wonder whether he knew the other fellow was here?"

"I think he did know. He's getting up. It's of no use to ask you how long you'll be. Good-bye."

Jonathan did not answer, but, as Stewart went out at the door, he followed him. The rain was still coming down, although not as desperately fast. It was coming down now with what seemed a steady purposefulness. In two minutes Jonathan was wet through. There was no sign of any of the others, and he was old-fashioned enough to wish that Laura had kept out of the way.

Stewart, regardless of the rain, strode on like a mountaineer. The road he was taking led westward three-quarters of a mile, and then turned northwards and crossed two very small rivers which emptied themselves into the loch. Their waters were slate-grey and whipped to a frenzy by the rain. The waters from Beinn Inverreigh were sucking and laughing and splashing, and everywhere was a roaring of waters in spate.

The road was full of pot-holes and little puddles. Head down and hands in pockets, Jonathan trudged through the mud, wet grit and loose stones, and, as he trudged, cursed the weather, the adventure, and the sense of duty which had sent him out from the table and the bright, cheerful fireside of the inn.

He could only keep Stewart in view by walking fast. He began to sweat, for his rainproof coat did not let the air through, and the weather, though wet, was not cold. Water squelched out of his shoes and his socks, and the turn-ups of his trousers were clogged and heavy with the rain. His hair was wet, his face, although he kept his chin tucked in his collar, was as though he had splashed it with water and then forgotten to wipe it. His nose dripped rain, and his trousers dragged, sopping, cold, and clammy against his shins.

At last he saw the others. Ian and Laura seemed to have caught up with Loudoun, for the three were standing in a line at the edge of some woods which hereabouts bordered the road. They were sheltering under trees, and were talking earnestly.

Stewart did not slacken his pace, and Jonathan thought for a moment that he was going to walk past the three. As he came near them, however, he shortened his stride and seemed to hesitate a little before going up to where they stood.

Jonathan broke into a trot, and gave a shout. Stewart did not so much as turn his head, although he must have heard him.

“Good Lord! He’s afraid of Loudoun’s bullet in his back,” thought Jonathan, lengthening out and hurriedly catching him up. He dropped into a walk, and side by side they walked up to the trees and halted.

No one spoke, except Laura at once to Jonathan.

“Here you are,” she said. This supplied Ian with a cue. He introduced Loudoun to Laura, and then to Jonathan. Loudoun, who looked extremely ill, said nothing. He bowed to them both, but kept his eyes fastened on

Stewart. He was rather like a dog which expects a kick. Laura said brightly to Stewart:

"I don't know your name, but we've met before—three times."

"Three times," repeated Stewart. "I recognized you, of course. Exactly what were you wanting?"

"We thought we might help you," said Laura, not knowing in the least what to say, for all speech, even the noblest, would have had the effect of banality, she felt, at such a time.

"Help me!" He laughed. "I need no help." He took a step nearer to Loudoun, who took a step back and collided with the trunk of a tree. His hat jerked off, but he did not pick it up. He merely stared anxiously at Stewart.

"You'll not quarrel here, Mr. James, in front of witnesses?" he said. There was pleading and conciliation in his tone.

"I'll not quarrel at all. My quarrels are with men, not with rats," said Stewart concisely. "At the old place, to-morrow, you should be praying for your guilty soul and your sins."

"At the old place, to-morrow," said Loudoun. "Very well." Then he stepped past Stewart and walked back towards the inn. Stewart shrugged and followed him. The others came close behind, having no idea what to do. Stewart turned his head over his shoulder.

"I've known him all my life," he said. "He's a bad man. Keep to your business, and let me manage mine."

Chapter Fifteen

★

The Ridge of Tears!
Druim nan deur!

War cry of the Maclennans

★

Careful and prolonged study of the map had brought Mrs. Bradley to a conclusion which was unsatisfactory in that there was no means by which she could put it to the test. It answered, however, those conditions which she deemed essential, being very near Craigullich, although not on the actual policies thereof, being also sufficiently remote from human habitation, and being on a road wide enough to take a small car if a car were seen to be necessary by either of the protagonists in what she hoped and expected would be the last act in a singular and interesting drama.

South of Glen Ullich ran an almost similar glen, except that it was wider and wilder. It was not to be confused with the long Glen Salachan with the little village at its head and its secondary road west to the coast road and south down the even longer Glen Stockdale. This was a little glen, comparatively speaking, unnamed on the map, remote, tucked away in a fold of the high moor that ran to the mountains, and having its own little river and a loch not unlike Loch Ullich, except that it seemed living and not dead.

Not only work on the map, but diligent enquiry in the neighbourhood, particularly from Dugald the Post, had caused Mrs. Bradley to select this sheltered spot as the most likely meeting-place of deadly enemies. It was called, in English, the Glen of the Oath, although she was told no legend to account for the name. Half-way up the glen was a *bothy* without a roof, but with its four stone walls still standing and not decayed.

She did not know what time was at her disposal, but she employed, next day, some men to thatch the *bothy,* and to weight the thatch with nets and stones, as she had seen done in Hebridean islands to prevent the wind lifting the thatch.

Brian and Catherine amused themselves on the shores of Loch Linnhe and Loch Leven, and scarcely missed her at all. The next day passed. At nightfall Mrs. Bradley, without a word to either of her companions, made her way to the *bothy* in a car driven by a henchman of hers, one Euan MacDonald, and, setting up the camp bed which she had had sent from Inverness for the purpose, she slept in the *bothy* all night.

Euan MacDonald, expert in such matters, brought peat for a fire, got it glowing outside in the evening, and brought it into the hut. Mrs. Bradley thanked him, paid the amount they had agreed on (which included a substantial tip which was never mentioned between them, but came in as part of the contract) and composed herself philosophically to rest.

The night passed, and at dawn she rose, ate a breakfast of dry biscuit, butter and marmalade, drank tea from a thermos flask in which the liquid was not altogether cold, and sat in the doorway of the *bothy* waiting for what should come to pass.

"What do we do?" asked Ian. The party of three, having followed Stewart and Loudoun back to the inn, were left, wondering what to do next.

"Go to bed, and wake up early," said Jonathan. He set the example by carrying Deborah off at a quarter to ten.

"What do you think will happen now?" she asked. Jonathan, snuggling down beside her and taking her in his arms, said he did not know or care.

"Sufficient unto the day," he said indistinctly. And then, with considerable vigour, "And sufficient unto the night, so don't ask a lot of silly questions."

Ian, temporarily divorced, spent an hour or more in the serious mental effort of trying to decide upon the morning mood of the protagonists in the drama, and the actions which might reasonably be expected to follow. He could come to no conclusion. The road they were on was lonely, the woods were near, there were mountain passes and corries where, so far as he could tell, any number of violent deeds could be accomplished and yet lie hidden from general knowledge, so, owning himself at a loss, he gave up thinking and was asleep as midnight struck.

Laura did not attempt to argue or reason. Breakfast was at eight. She fell asleep looking forward to that hour.

It came to the same thing exactly in the end. By the time the party had assembled and were eagerly watching the other table to see when the men descended, both Stewart and Loudoun had gone. Nine o'clock struck, and ten. Then Laura spoke to the chambermaids. Both gentlemen, after breakfasting together at six, had left the hotel on foot and were not expected to return.

"Maybe they would be climbing," was the general opinion, expressed diffidently in the face of Laura's disappointment and dismay.

"We've missed the bus all right," said she to the others. "They've gone. What's more, they left the inn together."

The only thing left to do was to pay the bill, hope for the best, and go after them. The old road wound by a wood and over the moors. Then it climbed the higher ground, was joined by a mountain track, circumnavigated some boggy little lochs which trailed out on the end of Loch Bena and at the side of Loch na Achlaise, and then bent westwards at fourteen hundred feet to within a few hundred yards of the main motor road to Glencoe, which it joined just south of Kingshouse, crossing it to arrive at the inn itself.

"And here I stay," said Jonathan, stretching his legs in the parlour, "unless we take a bus to Ballachulish."

"We'll miss all the fun if we do. What do you say, Ian?" asked Laura. Ian signified his willingness to go on.

"Then you go without us," said Jonathan. "My own view is that murder has already been committed, if it's going to be committed at all. But why blokes who had breakfast together, apparently in an amiable spirit, should then go out and lay for one another, passes my comprehension and belief. I think we're on the wrong tack, and I'm not bothering any more about it. We've got the wrong pig by the ear."

"Aren't you really bothering? " asked Deborah, when they were alone. He shrugged and laughed.

"Why should I? We've made fools of ourselves so far. Aunt Adela will lay down her cards and scoop the pool, you'll see. She always does. She weaves the web, and, in the end, the flies walk into it."

"But don't you think we ought to go with the others?"

"No, I don't," said Jonathan roundly.

"It's my fault, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is your fault," he answered violently. "And if we weren't in a damn-fool public place instead of in our own house, I'd demonstrate to you how much your fault it is. I wish we hadn't brought you. All this unnatural hiking is the last thing on earth you ought to be doing. It's too much for you, and, murder or no murder, I'm not having any more of it."

"But, darling . . ."

"There's nothing doing, Deb. We came here for a holiday. What are we getting? A job of work which by rights the police ought to do, and would do much better."

"Yes, I know, but we're in for this now, and I'm not going to back out to please you or anybody."

"Rank insubordination. You'll do as you're told."

"I never have done as I was told, and I'm not going to begin just because . . . just because . . ."

"Just because what? " asked Jonathan, suddenly tender, and speaking with anxious quietness.

"Just because I'd rather," said Deborah, shivering. "I don't want to chase murderers, any more than you want me to; and I loathe hiking; so do you; but we're in for both, and that's that."

"Well, look here, then! I'll strike a bargain. If you'll come straight back to Ballachulish, by bus, and get orders directly from Aunt Adela, I won't say a word against anything she wants us to do. But it's ridiculous to kill ourselves for nothing. . . ."

"You don't mean ourselves; you mean me."

"Will you come back by bus?"

"No, I won't."

"Then here we stay."

"Don't be quarrelsome," said Deborah uncertainly.

"Don't be aggravating," said Jonathan, laughing. "What good can we do if we *do* walk?"

"We could hurry, and catch up the others."

"Pointless. Look here, there's only one way those fellows can take, and that's the road through Glencoe, unless they take the *larig* over the Devil's Staircase. Now, then; suppose they take the *larig?* Ian and Laura are much more likely to catch them up there than we are. Suppose we go by bus through Glencoe, we get to Ballachulish before them, and cut them off from

their *rendezvous,* wherever that may happen to be. But the answer to the whole question is that we are unlikely to do a scrap of good, whatever we do. Therefore I say let's take the bus, and be comfortable. So pack up your traps, and let's go."

"They may be on Rannoch Moor, where the other man's body was found."

"Yes, they may be. I'd thought of that, too. But it's no good, Deb. They've been too quick for us if they *are* on Rannoch Moor, and we might just as well save our legs. We couldn't possibly be in time to stop the fight, even if we could find them on the moor, and we probably couldn't."

"I think we ought to try."

"Do you? All right. You win. We'll go to the place where Aunt Adela thinks the murder of Ure took place. Then, if there's nothing doing, I take it for granted you'll come back to Ballachulish *my* way."

"Yes, that's fair," said Deborah. The morning was rapidly clearing, and they stepped out on to the road with higher spirits than would have been the case had the weather continued to be wet. Nevertheless, Deborah was soon aware that she was tired. Jonathan watched her without appearing to do so, and was glad that the walk was not a long one. It was boggy and heavy, however, and their feet were wet and their shoes covered in mud by the time that they reached the shepherd's hut.

There was no sign of Ian or Laura, and no sign, either, of the men. Jonathan led the way to the place beside the sheep-walk where Mrs. Bradley had gathered the blood-bespattered bracken—or as near as he could guess it, for he had not been with her and Laura at the time. It made no difference, however. Nobody was about, and the wild and desolate moor, like some forgotten quagmire on the moon, stretched apparently endlessly around them, hedged, fenced and guarded by its mountains, and remote as on the day of creation.

"There's nothing here," said Deborah, oppressed by the awful stillness. "Let's go back to the road."

They turned immediately, and hastened back to the hut. Jonathan peered inside it, but it was empty. They made their way back to the inn and from there to the new road through Glencoe to wait for a conveyance.

Laura and Ian, imagining that there was little hope of overtaking the two men, who had gained a considerable start of them, had taken the route afterwards agreed upon by Jonathan and his wife, except that, having tried

the moor and the hut, they came back to Kingshouse, and, making little of the miles which lay between them and Ballachulish, soon passed Stob nan Cobar, Beinn Fhada and the higher mountains of the north side, and came in the early afternoon to Loch Treochatan, flanked by the cleft peak of a stony hill.

The road was joined beyond the loch by the old road through the glen, and this they took, preferring its winding sweeps to the gorges and blasted cuttings of the shorter motor road.

"Of course, they may travel part of the way together," suggested Ian. Laura thought this unlikely.

"They couldn't trust one another," she said.

"Oh, I don't know," said Ian. "Loudoun isn't a bad sort of fellow in his way, and although I don't know much about Stewart . . ."

"Oh, I don't think *he* would turn treacherous," said Laura. "He doesn't seem that sort at all."

"Well, there you are, then. I know more about the one, and you know more about the other, and we each back our own man to play fair. But do people who've inherited hate and blood feuds and so on, care about fairness and honesty? Wouldn't they, if they saw the chance, take a pop at doing their enemy down? I mean, it isn't a game they're playing. I wouldn't care to bet on either of them remembering he's a gentleman if a likely chance turned up of being able to lay out the other without there being witnesses, and in a place where the body wouldn't be found."

"If they're not together," said Laura, "that means that one of them has come this way to Ballachulish, and the other must have gone south by Tyndrum and then north by Connell Ferry, don't you think? I wonder how they decided? It's a bit like Red Riding Hood and the wolf."

"Except that they'll find a pretty lively grandmother at the other end," said Ian with a chuckle.

"I wish we were with her," said Laura, stepping out faster. "I wonder whether she's at Craigullich or at the hotel?"

Mrs. Bradley, as they found later, was not at either. Content with her newly-thatched *bothy* and the peat-fire which went with it, she surveyed the lovely little glen with simple affection. In case she had chosen wrongly, the Cameron policemen were patrolling the policies of Craigullich and the country between Duror and Appin. She did not believe she was wrong, however, and waited with expectation but not impatience.

On the morning when Stewart, Loudoun, Laura, Ian, Deborah, and Jonathan left the Kinsghouse Inn, she seated herself in the sun outside the door of the hut, and knitted a shapeless grey garment whose length seemed disproportionate to its width and whose claim to usefulness lay purely in the fact that its composition assisted thought. She was wrapped in a grey shawl out of which her black head emerged with a sibylline effect which seemed to startle a large crow which, after flapping lazily down the glen, came to earth with an ungainly lurch and stagger, cursed the uneven ground, and then, giving a shocked squawk at the sight of Mrs. Bradley, made off with a scuttling rush of legs and wings. It got into the air, squawked defiance and obloquy at her, and then made off up the glen like an evil spirit.

The day wore on. She had her simple lunch and exchanged her knitting for a book. The afternoon came and the day began to fade. The glen became quiet with sunset. There was still no sign of the men. Mrs. Bradley began to believe that she had miscalculated; that the men had already met, and that what she had hoped to prevent was already an accomplished fact.

It was the time of the new moon, and, while the day was still light, the sliver of white appeared at the head of the glen. Behind the far hills the sky was orange-pink, and above the glen it was deeply and wonderfully blue. A pale light, primrose-coloured, lay between the blue and the sunset, and the distant hills were not black but of palest violet. Nearer, they were blue and less clearly cut, and the moorland hills near at hand were dark with their little deeps, and greenish upon their heights.

The river, which ran through the glen and spread into the small shallow loch with its green and grassy banks and lichened boulders, was like a succession of rapids into the loch, as, cutting its bed, it came upon ledges of stone which, in time, had made miniature waterfalls. The recent heavy rain had made these into cascades which filled the whole glen with sound, yet a sound that seemed part of the silence.

The *bothy* was not near the water, but had been built in the widest part of the glen, on firm ground just below the stony outcroppings of the hill.

She waited and waited, but night came and she retired into the *bothy* and went to sleep. The fact that it was sleep on a hair-trigger mattered not to her. It was the kind of sleep to which she was accustomed.

At just after midnight she woke. Something, she knew, had disturbed her; some suspicious sound had occurred; some noise had been made which

had sent a message to her subconscious mind. She crept from her bed and went to the entrance of the hut.

The moon had set, but the sky was brilliant with stars. Careful to make no sound, she crouched on the ground at the side of the door and listened. She watched; but nothing rewarded her. She went back to her austere bed, lay down again and did not sleep. At the first faint light she got up and went again to the door. She crept out, went down to the shallow edge of the loch, bathed her face and hands in its waters, dried herself on a handkerchief, and then walked west towards the sea.

The level stretch of grass was short and green; greener at sunrise than at any other time in the day; but its greenness was interrupted. A black hole, softly, boggily dark, gaped like a grave at the northern edge of the water.

By tea-time on the previous day, the party from Kingshouse had, two of them on foot and the other two in a motor-coach, rejoined Catherine and Brian at Ballachulish. There was no news of Mrs. Bradley, for she had communicated to no one but the Camerons her decision to picket the glen. Not knowing what else to do, and advised by Laura, supported roundly by Deborah, that she would not want her plans interfered with, the two men decided to remain at the hotel until they received further orders.

Nothing came all that night, and they went to bed at eleven. Before dawn Deborah woke.

"What's the matter?" asked Jonathan, feeling her stir in his arms.

"Something's happening," she said. "And I'm afraid."

She got up and dressed. Jonathan, impressed, got up, too, and before breakfast they were out on the moors and taking the coast road south towards Appin.

"How do you know the right way?" he asked, striding to keep up with her, for Deborah was half-running along the highway.

"I know," she answered. "I don't know how, but I know. There must be something happening at Craigullich."

They met Mrs. Bradley not far from the Duror Inn.

"Oh," said Jonathan, "there you are! Deb got frightened. She thought something must have happened."

"I think it's happening now," said Mrs. Bradley.

There was no one at Craigullich when they arrived. The inspector had left a message saying that they had received a call to go to Inverary, and

would be back as soon as they could. New evidence had turned up with regard to the murder of Ure on Rannoch Moor.

"Might mean anything or nothing," said Jonathan, when he had read the message. "There are always people to swear to these things, but the police will have to investigate the matter, I suppose. The human craze for notoriety is extraordinary. By the way, what evidence have *you* got against the Loudouns?"

"None, child."

"Then . . . ?"

"I know one killed his brother, and I am certain that he and his brother, between them, made an end of Ure."

"What shall you do? Shall you hand Loudoun over to the police, if and when we catch him?"

"On a charge of—what? I can't prove my assertions, you know. On the other hand, if the police get their hands on the man, it will be most unfortunate if they do not find evidence against him."

"Doesn't sound like you to say that?"

"Doesn't it?" She grinned, "Perhaps I have something else in view for Mr. Loudoun. One never knows."

"The fourth commandment does come home to roost, doesn't it? I suppose both these Loudouns suffer because of their father and mother. Stewart, too. What's going to happen to him if he doesn't get his revenge? I can't understand a fellow coming back half across the world just to slug a man. He can't have thought much of his property to stay away from it all these years." He went on to give Mrs. Bradley details of the chase after Loudoun and Stewart.

"One of them is here," she said when he had finished. "Which one I do not know." She described the grave she had seen, and added, "I suspect it is Stewart, but that is only surmise. Whoever did it must have brought the spade from Craigullich. I looked everywhere for the spade, but did not find it."

"We ought to go back," said Jonathan. "They may have met by now."

"They will meet at Craigullich, child, I think," said Mrs. Bradley. "That is why I wish to waylay them. Let us get to the house. We are three. That should be enough to command the approaches from the upper windows."

"We can expect Ian and Laura at any time now, I should imagine," said Deborah. "I left a note to tell them which way we had gone."

"Good," said Mrs. Bradley. "Then we may look forward to their joining us, but not, I think, until Laura has had her breakfast. She is not at her best in a fasting condition, and knows it."

"I'll tell you what," said Jonathan. "If the police have received a false message from Inverary they'll be back, too, pretty soon. We ought to be able to cover both glens with their help. One lot can watch by the grave, and the other can stay up at the house."

"There is no need to watch the grave yet," said Deborah, with great distaste. "What morbid ideas you've got! And I refuse to see anyone killed. Do I *have* to look out of a window?"

"Just as you like," said Mrs. Bradley. "You won't see anyone killed, but it would be useful if I could know as soon as possible if anyone approaches the house, or, better still, the loch. That is all."

"Right. Which window shall I take?"

The three of them went up the stairs, and whilst Jonathan stood at the window which lighted the staircase, and Deborah sat on the arm of a chair at the window of the bedroom which Mrs. Bradley and Catherine, at different times, had occupied, Mrs. Bradley herself made a rapid tour of the house.

"Interesting," she said, "and enlightening, too. I should say that none of these rooms, with the exception of the room I slept in and the bedroom which I suppose old Morag occupied, and, later, Ellen (whom the police, by the way, have identified and exonerated in Craig Mellon) slept in, have been used for a good many years. There is a camp bed with blankets in the room from which Loudoun—the dead one—emerged on the night when I slept here, but his fingerprints are thick on dusty furniture, and the other rooms have not been entered. It certainly looks as though the Loudoun tenancy of Craigullich has been of singularly short duration and was not intended to be permanent. They were after the treasure, nothing else."

At this point Deborah called out that she thought she could see someone approaching.

"It's a man, I think," she added, as Jonathan joined her.

"It's Loudoun," said Mrs. Bradley, coming from the point of vantage she had chosen. "Now, take care, Jonathan. He's armed, and he's prepared to encounter Stewart, so don't look like Stewart if you can help it! Come

with me. We'll make for the woodshed. He can't drag the loch without a boat—or believes he can't, which means the same thing for our purpose. Deborah, go into the bedroom and lock the door. Don't be afraid for Jonathan, child," she added kindly. "I was joking. He shall come to no harm."

"Hop it," said Jonathan. "It's safest for me if you do what Aunt Adela tells you."

Realizing that this would be so, Deborah, feeling rather faint, went into the bedroom and concealed herself behind the curtains. The woodshed and all its possible drama was out of her line of vision, but, to her horror, the man approached the house and came in. She could hear him below. Satisfied, however, that the place was empty, he soon went out again. She listened, terrified and trembling, to hear the sound of a gun, but there was nothing. Then, to her great relief, she saw her husband approaching the house. He came straight upstairs, and said cheerfully:

"It's all right now, Deb. We've got him. Let me in. He walked straight into Aunt Adela and a square bottle filled full of varnish. I thought she'd done for him at first. She caught him full on the base of the skull with one of the edges. Still, she's scientific in these matters, and when we had tied him up he was just beginning to come round. Murmuring broken words, as they say in books. Very broken. Even I haven't heard some of them before, and I've knocked around a goodish bit." He took his wife in his arms. She began to cry. "Now, then, that's enough of that," he said. "When this is over we'll have a real holiday at Clacton or Blackpool or somewhere."

Deborah laughed and dried her eyes:

"I'll go back now," he continued, "and hike him up to the house. He's to be put in the dining-room and threatened. At least, I think she *said* frightened*,* but it means the same thing, I suppose."

It did not mean quite the same thing. Loudoun, dumped in a chair and told to keep quiet, obeyed for exactly ten minutes. Then Jonathan, left to guard him, was just calling Mrs. Bradley's name when he heard a sibilant whisper, faint, at first, as a zephyr, and then increasing in volume. It seemed to come from just outside the door.

"Peace, peace," it breathed; and then, in a louder tone, "I must have peace for my soul. Let me sleep, let me sleep, let me sleep. I will sleep for ever and ever."

Loudoun, in spite of his bonds, struggled on to his feet.

“For God’s sake! ” he said. “What’s that?”

“You ought to know,” said Jonathan. “It’s the sound of running water. Sit down and keep quiet, as you were told.”

“No, no,” moaned the wretched creature. “The voice! The voice!”

“What voice?” Jonathan knew now who the ghost was.

“Surely you heard it? God! There it is again!”

“My son! My son!” Said the voice. “I must speak to my son. How can I sleep unless I speak to my son before he dies?”

“He won’t die! I swear it! I swear he won’t die,” gasped Loudoun. Jonathan stepped forward, caught him as he fainted, and laid him flat on the rug.

“He’ll never live to be hanged, at this rate,” he said, as Mrs. Bradley came in. “Or, if he does, he’ll be hanged on his own confession. I don’t think he’ll stand much more.”

“Be that as it may,” said Mrs. Bradley, “all we want now are Stewart and the police, and Dougald the Post to get a telegram sent to Janet Forbes.”

“I suppose she will be needed to swear to Stewart. But will she recognize him after such a very long time? She only recollects him as a child.”

“She knows all about Stewart. She has met him quite recently. I knew that when she avoided describing him to me.”

“Old Morag, I suppose, could swear to Stewart, too.”

“Old Morag has given us valuable information, but I am not sure that a court of law would regard her as a very reliable witness.”

“Here are Ian and Laura, and with them the police,” said Deborah, who had come in and was looking out of the window.

The police, who had come prepared, now pulled on fishermen’s boots, and, taking their tackle in their hands, began wading into the loch, preceded by one of their number who carried a long stick with which he tested the depth of the water as he went forward. Except for a small area in the centre, the water was nowhere more than three feet deep.

The work was slow and thorough. Several times the hooks caught, but no result was obtained until one of the men, who was standing almost up to his waist in the deeper part of the loch and casting his grappling hook into the very centre, gave a cry that there was something along the bottom, but that he could not hook it.

Upon this Jonathan, who was watching from the bank, volunteered to dive. His aunt came quickly up, drew him away from Ian, by whom he was standing, and spoke to him softly and earnestly. He stiffened, then shrugged, and began to take off his clothes.

"I'll go up to the house and get Loudoun to tell me where to get some towels," said Ian, making off. Jonathan waded in and began to swim.

"Now, sir! " said the sergeant. Jonathan breathed and dived. He came up empty-handed.

"I'll have to take your irons down with me," he said. "I can touch it, but I can't lift it. The mud must be holding it down."

He dived with the hooks in his hands, and came up gasping.

"Try now," he said, swimming towards the bank. The water of the loch was like ice. He shuddered and shuddered with cold as he climbed up on to the shore and grasped the towels which his aunt was holding. She gave him one and rasped him into warmth with the other.

"Now get on up to the house. The police have a fire in the kitchen," she said, as she bundled his sweater over his head, and gave him a push towards the door. Jonathan, fumbling with the belt of his flannels, nodded and smiled.

"It was—what you said," he observed. "Will you—must you stay here? Of course, you must."

He hurried towards the house and the Camerons' fire. Mrs. Bradley, looking grim, watched the efforts of the police. It took them forty minutes to recover the treasure. It consisted of an iron-bound wooden box so stout that the water had not yet rotted it through. Inside was the pitiful skeleton of a child. An iron casket was clamped by a rusted chain round the bones of the thighs.

"You can come out now, Mr. Stewart," said Mrs. Bradley, turning from her examination of these relics. To the slight but disguised astonishment of everyone else, Stewart emerged from the bushes among which he had been hiding and from which he had watched the dragging of his loch, and came towards her.

"What is it? Is it treasure?" he demanded. "Old Morag used to tell me . . ."

"It is treasure of a sort," said Mrs. Bradley. She moved aside. "It is the treasure that passed from David Loudoun to Lorna Stewart. It is the child, and, I have no doubt, the jewels that David gave her. It is treasure for you,

because it is the vindication, I think, of your father, who committed no murder, at all. We shall find, I fancy, when we can get this iron casket open—the lock, as you see, has rusted in—that it was Rory Loudoun who shot David Loudoun, and that your father was falsely accused. It was Rory Loudoun, too, who killed the child before he married your mother—the child that was born in England before Malcolm Stewart came home."

She turned to Laura.

"You remember what Morag has hinted from time to time? It was only hearsay evidence, of course, but it seems to have proved itself now. We shall know when we open the box."

"You mean—you mean . . ." said Stewart, stammering.

"I mean your father was an innocent man, but he was a man who did not want to live. He wanted to suffer—and sleep."

Stewart went very pale.

"Well, well," he said. "Maybe he'll sleep sound enough now."

The *Kerisaig* lay off Elgol in the Isle of Skye. Laura was at the controls, Ian and Catherine were on deck, for the sea was as calm as glass in the shut-in bay, and Deborah, Jonathan, and the boy Brian had returned to the mundane air of England. Mrs. Bradley sat beside Laura in the well, and gazed at the Cuillins, jagged against the sky.

"There are still things I don't understand," said Laura. "First, what about that typescript which Loudoun gave Ian to read?"

"I've thought about that, and re-read it several times," said Mrs. Bradley. "I am inclined to think that we stumbled upon an embryo author there. The careful style, the use of the third person, the fact that the story does not altogether correspond with what the man told Ian by word of mouth, all indicate a literary treatment. I suspect the typescript of being a bone flung at a dog—a bone the man may have wanted to keep for himself, but with which he felt he had to part to keep the dog busy. As I think we argued before, it was essential to his plan that Ian should stay downstairs until Alexander Loudoun got back."

"Yes, I see. Now what about those two men—the ex-criminals? What exactly was their part? Whose side were they on? I feel I ought to know this, but I can't quite work it out."

"Well, first they were employed to kidnap Hector, and keep him safely on Skye until Alexander got away with the treasure. Through Ian he got

away from them all too soon, and so was able to take his brother by surprise and murder him. The men came back to Craigullich to report, only to find their employer dead and their erstwhile prisoner in a position to blackmail them. They then fell in with his proposal that they should work with him—they were only mercenaries, after all.

"He got rid of them for a day on Beinn Cruachan whilst he worked out a new plan, for by this time James Stewart had come on the scene and was a threat to the whole of the enterprise, and arranged with them that, as we were rather a nuisance, they should kidnap young Brian and keep us busy looking for him on Skye."

"How did the Loudouns know about the treasure in the first place?"

"I think old Morag told them. You see, I think they were her sons. Minnie is a word used here for mother."

"Then weren't they Loudouns at all? Wasn't Rory Loudoun their father?"

"Oh, yes—or David Loudoun. The Loudouns were bad all through. Hector or Alexander probably met the other two criminals in prison. That's why they were able to employ them and count on their help. Did it never strike you as strange that Janet Forbes left the house so soon? She knew what Rory and David Loudoun were like, and what Morag had suffered. No doubt tongues had wagged in the *clachan."*

"Well, it's all a queer tale," said Laura. "And the jewels were almost worthless after all," she added regretfully.

"Their value was sentimental only, but Morag didn't know that. She found out somehow that they had been thrown in the loch, and she decided that they were not Stewart property, and that her own sons were entitled to them. One can see the logic of that. On the other hand, she knew that her boys had no claim at all to the rest of the property. Stewart should have what was his own. She warned him as soon as she believed that her boys intended to occupy Craigullich with her."

"Queer that Rory Loudoun should have written a confession of what he'd done and then throw it into the loch with the murdered boy."

"The confession was as near as he dared get to an act of atonement. One can't read it any other way."

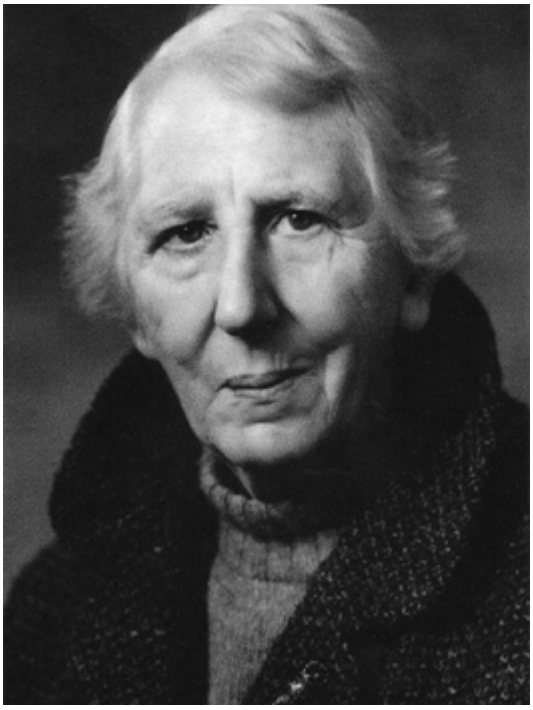
Laura stared at the sea and the landscape before her. Cumulus cloud, soft and white, but promising later rain, was billowing over the bay. The sky, seen beyond it, was blue, and the water in which the boat lay, so far

unshadowed by cloud, was the colour of turquoise. Farther out it was shadowed with grey, and a great grey cliff came almost sheer to the water. The Cuillins, fantastic and beautiful, tossed their ragged yet strangely symmetrical peaks like the cloaks of the northern giants, who could change themselves at will into mighty hills and their eyes into upland lakes. Their beauty and their serenity were awesome.

From the peak came Ian's lazy voice quietly singing, and Catherine's sudden laughter. Mrs. Bradley turned her alert, black head to take in the words of the song.

"Wull ye gang tae the Hielands, Leezie Lindsay?
Wull ye gang tae the Hielands wi' me?
Wull ye gang tae the Hielands, Leezie Lindsay,
My pride and my darling tae be?"

About the Author



Gladys Mitchell was born in the village of Cowley, Oxford, in April 1901. She was educated at the Rothschild School in Brentford, the Green School in Isleworth, and at Goldsmiths and University Colleges in London. For many years Miss Mitchell taught history and English, swimming, and games. She retired from this work in 1950 but became so bored without the constant stimulus and irritation of teaching that she accepted a post at the Matthew Arnold School in Staines, where she taught English and history, wrote the annual school play, and coached hurdling. She was a member of the Detection Club, the PEN, the Middlesex Education Society, and the British Olympic Association. Her father's family are Scots, and a Scottish influence has appeared in some of her books.